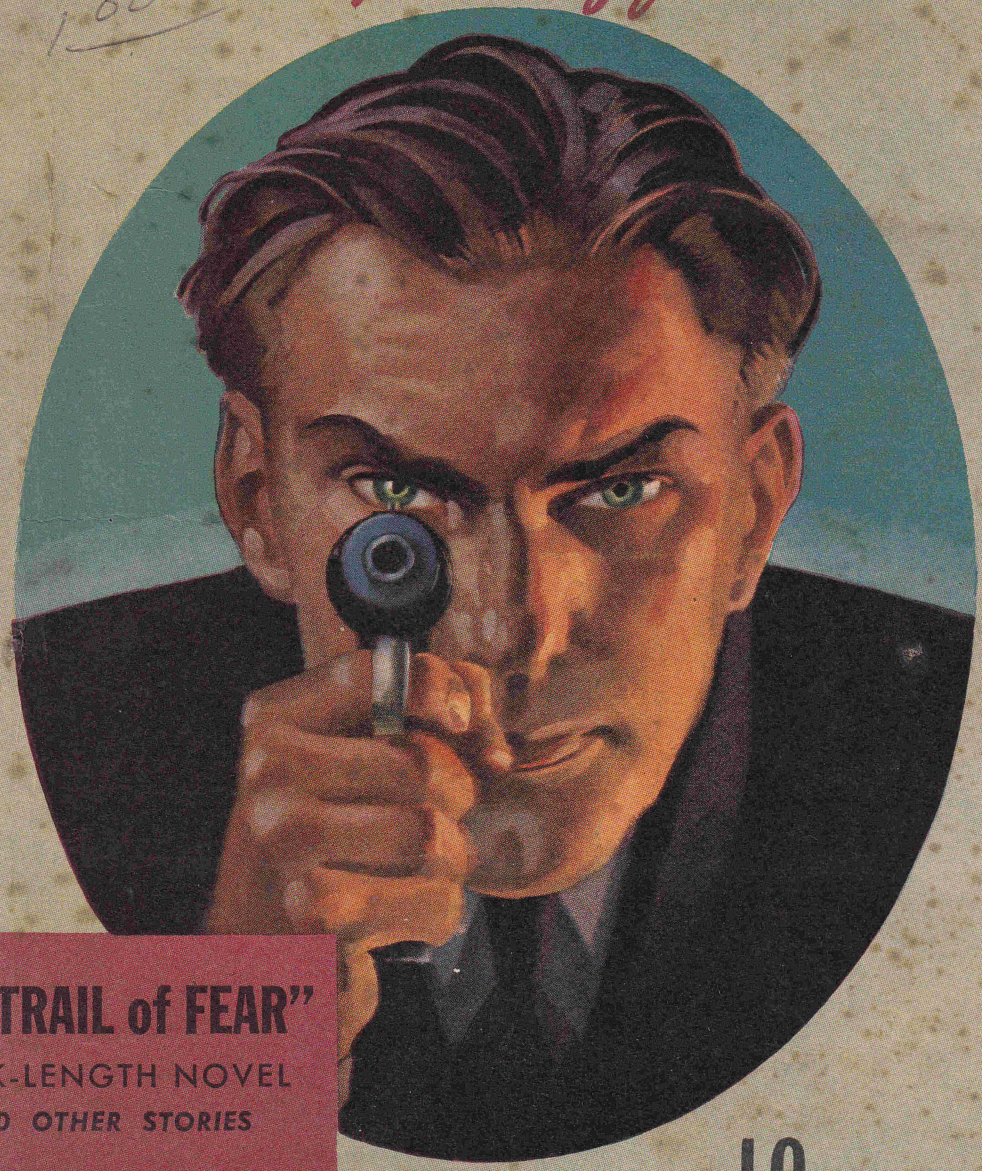
The WHISPERER

OCT. 40

The Long Arm of Justice

1.00



"The TRAIL of FEAR"

BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

AND OTHER STORIES

OCTOBER 1940 • 10 CENTS

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

THE WHISPERER

"Boys, in 1 minute through that door will come our new star salesman—"

JUST when we had got to thinking our sales were doing extra all right, J. P., the sales manager, whammed home the old body punch at the first-of-the-month meeting.

"Boys," he said, "in just one minute, through that door will come our new star salesman . . . and I expect every man to cooperate with him to the fullest."

No kiddin', a pin dropping would have sounded like an exploding bombshell. Jim Smith looked at me, I stared at Ed Johnson. What was going on? Who was this newcomer? What kind of a bird would he be? Who was going to be "fired"? J. P. sure had us in a dither —and I mean dither!

And then, through the door staggered the office boy carrying a tray as big as a cart wheel. On top of it stood twelve big, gleaming bottles of Listerine Antiseptic.

J. P. grabbed the nearest one off the tray and slammed it down on the desk.

"Here he is," he bellowed, "and none of you guys had better laugh, either. For a long time I've noticed that some of you men—and I'm not mentioning any names, all too frequently have a breath that would knock a cow down. It all adds up to this: *If I've noticed it, customers must have noticed it, too.* And that's bound to be bad for business. After coming up against a case of halitosis a couple of times, a customer is entitled to close the door on you—*for keeps.*"

We all stirred uneasily.

"From now on," J. P. continued, "this is an order; take a swig of Listerine Antiseptic every morning before you hit the street. Get that? Not now and then after a big night . . . but *every* morning. Step up, gentlemen, and get your bottle."

Maybe J. P. was right, and maybe it's only coincidence, but I'm doggoned if the sales for the next six months weren't better, in spite of a lot of tricky stuff from our competitors.

How's *Your* Breath?

In business, it's just common sense to take precautions that your breath doesn't offend. Odor seldom gets an order . . . often loses one.

More and more smart salesmen recognize this and start the business day with Listerine. Notable for its antiseptic and deodorant power, Listerine renders the breath sweeter, fresher, purer.

Why not get in the habit of using Listerine Antiseptic yourself? It makes your mouth feel so wonderfully fresh and clean. The moment Listerine enters the oral cavity, it begins to halt the fermentation of tiny food particles which, some authorities say, is the principal cause of bad breath, then overcomes the odors that fermentation causes.

Keep Listerine Antiseptic handy at home and in the office, and tuck a bottle in your bag when you travel. Rinse the mouth with it before every business and social engagement. It really pays! Lambert Pharmacal Co., *St. Louis, Mo.*

LISTERINE CHECKS HALITOSIS (*Bad Breath*)

I Jumped My Pay from $18 to $50 a Week!

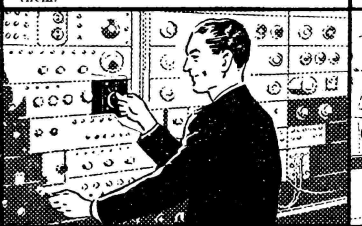
Here's how I did it

by S. J. E.
(NAME AND ADDRESS SENT UPON REQUEST)

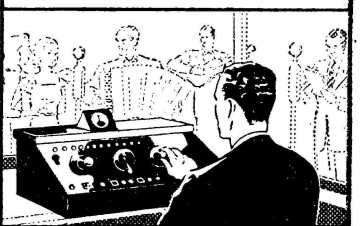
"I had an $18 a week job in a shoe factory. I'd probably be at it today if I hadn't read about the opportunities in Radio and started training at home for them."

"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make $5 to $10 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."

"When I finished training I accepted a job as serviceman with a Radio store. In three weeks I was made service manager at more than twice what I earned in the shoe factory."



"Eight months later N.R.I. Graduate Service Department sent me to Station KWCR as a Radio operator. Now I am Radio Engineer at Station WSUI. I am also connected with Television Station W9XK."



"N. R. I. Training took me out of a low-pay shoe factory job and put me into Radio at good pay. Radio is growing fast."

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Est. 25 Years

Find out today how I Train You at Home to BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN

If you can't see a future in your present job, feel you'll never make much more money, if you're in a seasonal field, subject to lay offs, IT'S TIME NOW to investigate Radio. Trained Radio Technicians make good money, and you don't have to give up your present job or leave home to learn Radio. I train you at home nights in your spare time.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, Police, Aviation, Commercial Radio; Loudspeaker Systems, Electronic Devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N.R.I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open many good jobs soon.

Many Make $5 to $10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make $5 to $10 a week extra in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

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Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Course in Radio and Television; shows more than 100 letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postcard—NOW!

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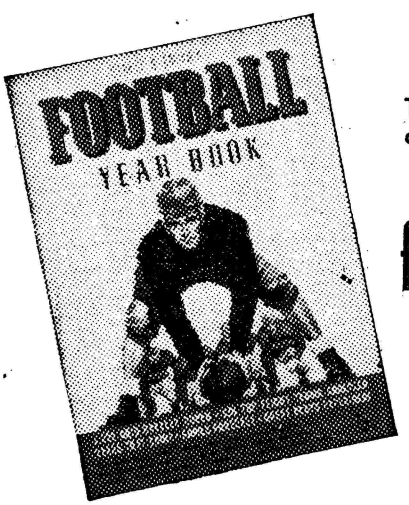

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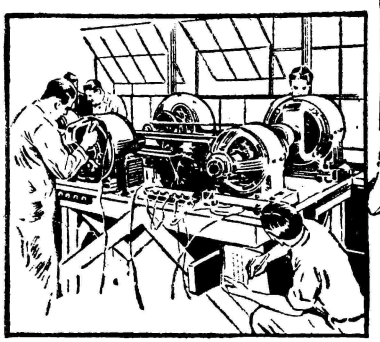

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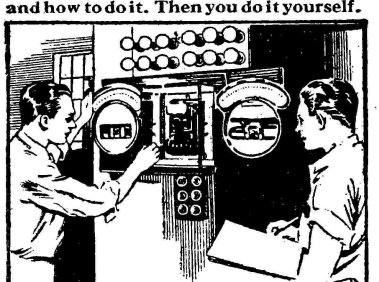

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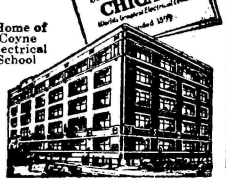

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The WHISPERER

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Fear drove Dr. Howell to the heart of darkest Africa; fear drove him home again—to his death! Crime weaves a pattern of mystery and jungle menace on a Long Island estate; then an eerie cry shatters the deathly silence, and The Whisperer, the long arm of justice, challenges the treachery of the underworld.

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COVER BY HUBERT ROGERS

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 9th 10c per COPY

All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

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STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC. • 79 7th AVE., NEW YORK

MEET THE WHISPERER

Usually, when a new magazine hits the stands, the publishers tell the readers why they feel that this magazine should appeal to them; tell of the work that has gone on behind the scenes, preparing the stories, working on the general idea of the magazine, to be sure that the public will like it.

In this case, we can be different. We don't have to tell you why we published this magazine, because you already know. You have been reading of the exploits of The Whisperer for a number of years in another Street and Smith publication —*The Shadow Magazine*—and have, with each succeeding issue, been more and more interested in making The Whisperer a character in his own right, getting more than a short story or a novelette about his activity. So, it is because The Whisperer appealed so strongly to readers of *The Shadow Magazine* that we heeded your request to publish his stories in a magazine of his own, so that you can get not only a short story, or a novelette, but a complete, book-length novel, such as appears in this issue.

You will find, here, every bit of the interest and excitement that are a part of The Whisperer character repeated manifold in the longer story. The Whisperer, the long arm of justice, operates the way you and I feel that the police should operate when ruthless crime strikes. However, we are at heart a democratic people, and we are too afraid that giving any one person or organization too much power would do us more harm than good in the end. Let that be as it may; Wildcat Gordon knows that he cannot overcome the red tape and routine of a big-city police department; he knows, in fact, that such routine and red tape may be pretty essential to the proper functioning of a vast organization. But he also knows that crime's biggest advantage over the organized forces of law and order is the fact that it has no rules, no regulations, that it must follow. It makes its own rules, always for its own advantage, and every one else has to suffer.

What better way to do a really good job than to combine the efficiency of the police department with the daring of an individual who drives to the heart of things without the routine that is otherwise common? And when the chief of the police department himself undertakes that task, the chances are all the better for a wipe-out of crime, even though the risk is that much greater for the man who dares to do that.

That is what we present to you in The Whisperer. James Gordon, youthful police commissioner, whose father was police commissioner before him—and whose father was killed by a crook's bullet—knows what he faces when he undertakes the task of policing a huge city. His father has told him of the difficulties that police labor under. Young Gordon, remembering the lessons taught him by his father, adds his youth and his yearning for adventure to the office of police chief, and under another guise, he tackles crime the only way it should be tackled—right at the base, tearing at its roots in a reckless, daring, smashing way.

All the while, he stands a double

risk. Not only is his life in danger at the hands of the crooks he is trying to root up, but the police department itself is after him, for no individual must be permitted to take the law into his own hands, even if the net result is good. Such a practice might result in a terrible catastrophe to organized society, so it must be stopped at the start. And Wildcat knows it; he realizes the chances he must take, but he is ready to take them. And therefore you get some of the most exciting, most pulse-stirring yarns that have ever been written.

The novel in this issue, "Trail of Fear," is one that you will remember for a long time. It has everything that a story needs, and it also has the ring of authenticity in it, for that is what makes a real story. We know you will like it, and we want to hear from you about your reactions to this and the other stories in this issue. Although The Whisperer is no stranger to us or to you, in most cases, we are always ready to improve, and to incorporate whatever suggestions you may have in our future plans for this magazine.

For example, you probably have noticed that our cover is quite different from the average magazine. There is no blood-and-thunder atmosphere about it. It is something that you can display anywhere and feel proud of it, for it is not only an interesting study, but is also a very-well done job of illustrating, as good as you'll get anywhere. Let us know what you think of this; do you like it this way, or do you prefer it another way?

Naturally, we hope that all of you will like our new magazine, but if you don't like some parts of it, don't let that keep you from writing. We're just as glad to get complaints as compliments, because we feel like the corner-store philosopher who said he never cared much for compliments, because he knew all his own good points quite well; it was the criticisms that interested him, for that was the only way he knew of that he could improve himself. So, if you know how we can improve ourselves, come right out and tell us. Many a reader's comment has been the start of a policy which has made magazines successful beyond all original hopes, and we're perfectly willing to have a huge success on our hands.

After you have finished The Whisperer novel, there are still many things in this magazine to hold your attention. We've added a number of short stories which we feel are stand-out yarns in the detective-mystery fields, all of them written by men who know what makes a story click.

The first one, on Page 76, is "Detective Bill Gives A Lesson." It is by George Allan Moffatt, who has appeared in just about every detective magazine published, so he must be good. You'll find the story as different as it is good; it has a human quality about it that will make it come close to your heart. Police work, as a rule, is pretty tough work, but there are more delicate moments to it, too.

There's a half-million-dollar murder mixed up in "The Corpse Next Door," which starts on Page 86. You may be interested in that sum of money, and in the man who is the key to the puzzling crimes mixed up in this yarn. The story is by Edward Ronns, whose stories most of you have read before.

A stolen car is a stolen car. As

Continued on page 75

the Trail of Fear

A Complete Book-length Novel By Clifford Goodrich

studded with mystery and violent death —and The Whisperer stalking the killers!

CHAPTER I.

DEATH FOLLOWS FEAR.

Fear had sent Dr. Stepan Howell scurrying to the steaming jungles of the Congo.

Fear had brought him back, a gaunt recluse on his immense estate on the north shore of Long Island.

The white-haired anthropologist lay motionless on the white bed. His thin cheeks were as bleached as the coverlet and the spotless sheets.

The room, in which he lay, was

painted with gleaming white enamel —an island of sanitary brilliance. There were only two dark spots—little jet-black wells of fear to break the monotony of the white that surrounded them. Those were the haggard eyes of Dr. Stepan Howell.

The intimates of Dr. Stepan, as he was known familiarly, often wondered what engendered the constant apprehension of impending doom that seemed to surround the gentle scientist. Howell had never told them. Buried deep within his thin chest was some secret, some grim reason, real or fancied, that kept Dr. Stepan Howell's thin lips sealed.

It was not the simple heart ailment that brought that fear. Those mild attacks had occurred before. There was no reason that Dr. Howell should not recover this time as he had before. No, there was something else, something intangible, something that he preferred to keep hidden from the sight of his fellow men.

The dark eyes strayed to the black pane of the window. Rain, blown by a raw wind, sheeted against the pane, formed a fast-moving curtain that dripped to the sill, fell from there to the ground. A faint shudder could be seen to run through the tall frame of the anthropologist.

Outside, it was a murky, blistering dusk. Strange noises came from the cages and corrals that housed the animals Dr. Howell used in his many experiments. There were the sharp barking sounds of the chimpanzees and other middle-sized primates. Rhesus monkeys, ring-tails, spider monks let loose a screaming chatter into the coming night. Hollow roars drifted up from the cages of the lions and tigers.

Darkness set in with an unseemly swiftness. The lowering clouds that brought the rain had shut out the twilight that might have eased the blackness of night into the world. Through the deepening veil of black, a furtive figure darted in and out of the shrubs that covered the velvet lawn of Dr. Howell's strange estate.

The quick, watchful figure was as dark, as black as the coming night, itself. A half-visible wraith, the dim figure moved swiftly toward the great house. It paused once, glanced at the brilliance that gleamed from the room in which Dr. Stepan Howell lay. In that reflection, the newcomer's eyes glittered weirdly like two tiny bits of fluorescent jade.

A whispering chuckle lifted into the rainy night, made an eerie mushroom of sound that enveloped the cages of the animals as well as the shrub-strewn lawn. Monkeys paused in the midst of their chattering, cocked their heads to listen.

Criminals often paused to listen to that awesome whisper of defiance. Usually, they fled when they heard it. The eerie challenge of the mystery man of the underworld, known as The Whisperer, announced the arrival of a doughty foe of crime, for whom there were no rules or regulations to act as a deterrent in the path of a justice stark in its swiftness.

The Whisperer moved with complete silence through the towering shrubs of the estate. The presence of the ghostlike nemesis of crime would have told anyone who knew him that the fear surrounding the estate of Dr. Howell was no idle threat of the imagination. The Whisperer had heard of that fear, and he had heard from a babbling, drunken tongue, that the wealth of Dr. Stepan Howell was soon to pass to the heirs who would claim it!

The Whisperer edged toward the window of the sickroom. He looked

in, saw the gaunt anthropologist motionless on the bed. He surveyed the room swiftly. It was a room Dr. Howell had prepared for treating cases of pneumonia and other pulmonary disorders. The room was sealed, could be used as an oxygen chamber, rather than the more common appliance known as the oxygen tent. In one corner there was a tank and compressor. Apparently, Dr. Stepan had needed extra oxygen in the cardiac disturbance that now beset him.

The ghostly figure chuckled softly and turned from the window. In the light from the sickroom, his white face was revealed. The chin was long, oddly pointed. The most startling features were those deep-green eyes. They were slanted, Oriental in their appearance.

The Whisperer moved off into the night, toward the cages of the animals. The foe of crime was clad entirely in black. The coat, trousers and the shoes were also black. His hair was the shade of jet. He moved without a sound. Suddenly he stopped, as if he had encountered an invisible wall.

The behavior of the animals confined to their pens and cages became suddenly restive, strange, as if they sensed a presence that could not be seen by man. Timber wolves began to howl in long mournful notes, as a hound dog is supposed to howl upon the death of its master. The man in black chuckled. Then he suddenly found himself enveloped in a maze of arms, legs and bludgeons!

The Whisperer was not alone on the broad expanse of Howell Acres!

Fists slammed out of the darkness, caught The Whisperer flush on the chin. Blackjacks whizzed through the air! The black-clad battler twisted, doubled as he dived straight into the milling mass of bodies. That sudden turn caught the criminals by surprise. They expected an attempt to retreat.

Red stabs of flame bit into the night! The attackers were using guns equipped with silencers. The eerie whispering challenge that answered the attack sent shivers up and down more than one hood's spine. Crime had before encountered the two amazing weapons of The Whisperer. Queer, oversized automatics seemed to leap into his hands. Lurid blue flame bit out in sharp jabs of death! The only sound was a fierce hissing, as if steam were released through a tiny nozzle.

The assailants screamed in pain; they began to separate. One of the mobbies—for The Whisperer recognized these foemen as gangsters from the sordid underworld of New York—barked orders for his men to hold together. The others thought differently. They had no wish to die before the superior marksmanship of The Whisperer. They began to scatter.

The leader of the gang also took to his heels. He crossed the path of light between The Whisperer and the window of the sickroom. The weird defiance of the nemesis of crime welled once more in the wet air. The Whisperer recognized that man, and it brought the picture before him more sharply into focus.

Angel Nigren was well known to the police of New York. The Angel was a boss of hired killers. His mob worked strictly for profit in any venture that was presented. A more ruthless mob of murderers did not exist on the eastern seaboard. The Angel was so named because of the innocence that was apparent in his youthful face; that is, until you saw his eyes. The Angel's eyes were pale bits of translucent quartz that

had no more color than they did emotion.

Where the Angel made his appearance, murder was sure to follow!

Angel Nigren got away. The Whisperer let him go for the moment. He did not want the Angel until he knew more angles of the crime he knew was stalking here. Chuckling softly, The Whisperer watched the professional killer fade into the darkness. Nigren's feet made soft padding sounds on the wet grass. It was those sounds that obscured others, moving swiftly upon The Whisperer from behind.

The new foe struck like a juggernaut. The Whisperer was not a small man. He was about average height. But what he lacked in bulk, he more than equaled in lithe power that overwhelmed his enemies.

But the gargantuan being that struck The Whisperer from behind was built like a bull gorilla. He attacked with a hollow roar that seemed to carry fear and rage. Huge hands reached out for The Whisperer. The impact of the charge sent him sprawling to the ground.

The Whisperer twisted, squeezed the triggers of his supersilenced guns. There was no sound this time, no tongues of bright blue flame. He had emptied the weapons at the gunmen and had not taken time to reload his weapons. He dropped the guns. Compact fists with the impact of tiny bombs whipped up at the new assailant.

The man grunted. In the light from the window, The Whisperer saw a bearded mountain of a man with eyes as black as his own clothing. Strange gutteral noises broke from thick lips that parted from stumpy, yellow teeth. It was a language that the enemy of crime did not understand.

He did, however, know the identity of this new enemy. Gregoire Lascalles was personal servant, caretaker and general handyman for Dr. Stepan Howell. A strange man with a weird hypnotic influence over his master, Gregoire Lascalles caused bystanders to turn and gape when he went into the nearby villages to shop.

Lascalles grunted in surprise at the fury of The Whisperer's defense. The foe of crime rained blows onto the bearded chin of Lascalles. The huge man muttered again in his strange tongue and shook his head in confusion. Slowly, he rolled from The Whisperer.

Both men reached their feet. The struggle had carried them many yards from the house—The Whisperer fighting silently, Gregoire Lascalles growling and roaring like some enraged animal.

How that fight might have ended is a matter of pure conjecture. Bull strength against agile force is always an uncertain battle. It did not, however, go to a conclusive end. A sudden scream pierced the night from the great house. It was the horror-filled note of a woman, stricken by some unexpected terror.

A white-clad figure raced through the night, calling the name of Gregoire. The Whisperer disentangled himself from the bearlike arms. Lascalles swung slowly around. The Whisperer whipped out a pencil flashlight and flicked it on.

The woman who raced toward them was beautiful in an exotic, regal sort of way. Her statuesque grace was startlingly apparent even with the rain sheeting down upon her unprotected head. Her eyes were dark and large with terror. This was Sofia Lascalles, wife of the queer gorillalike caretaker.

"Gregoire," she called in panic.

"He's dead! He died, just now!"

The Whisperer was silent. His ears listened to other footsteps that followed the woman. A man stumbled into view. He was a gaunt, clothespole of a man. His features were much like those of Dr. Stepan Howell. The difference was in the lines of dissipation that etched his thin face.

A soft whisper of surprise escaped the wraithlike man who held that flashlight. Another piece of the puzzle seemed to fall into the slot for which it was intended.

This man, The Whisperer realized, was Kent Howell, the drunkard, wastrel brother of the eminent scientist who now lay in the sickroom.

He was also the man whose babbling tongue in an underworld dive had informed The Whisperer that the wealth of Dr. Howell would soon pass on to his heirs!

Sofia Lascalles shrank against her husband. Her tall, stately body quivered as if a sudden chill had seized her. A soft cry came from her throat. Her voice was a full, low contralto. If she were acting, she had missed a profession that would have paid her well.

"Gregoire, I am afraid," she said. "I have called the police."

Gregoire Lascalles frowned, as if he had no liking for a visit from the authorities. Kent Howell voiced approval. The tall, gaunt brother of Dr. Stepan had a voice that seemed to belong to a child.

"That is fine," he shrilled. "If there is anything wrong in the death of my brother, it should be immediately investigated."

None of the three noticed the disappearance of The Whisperer. The ghostlike crime fighter simply drifted into the blackness, became a part of it, himself. Gregoire, his wife and Kent Howell turned toward the house. They all walked slowly, as if the sudden turn of things had been too much for them.

Any of them or all of them could have been bewildered. And—any or all of them might not have been.

It was not long before the wail of a siren indicated the arrival of police. It just so happened that three members of the department had been investigating a minor homicide in that section. They had been contacted by the police short-wave radio. The death of a man with the international reputation in science of Dr. Stepan Howell was something that merited instant attention.

That was particularly true in the case of the long-nosed man who led the police up the steps of Howell Manor. The man's eyes were small and close set. The mouth reminded one of a sluggish fish found in the muddy bottoms of fresh-water streams and known as a sucker.

Deputy Police Commissioner Henry Bolton was always glad to be of service in matters affecting the famous or the wealthy. He was particularly appreciative of opportunities that permitted him to reach such scenes before his boss, Commissioner James "Wildcat" Gordon. Henry had two ambitions burning within him: One of them was to succeed Wildcat; the other was to end the career of The Whisperer. Henry resented the strange aid the police often received from the underworld mystery man.

Henry rushed into Howell Manor and demanded to know what had happened. Sofia Lascalles answered him. She nodded at Kent Howell.

"Kent was visiting his brother," she explained in smooth flowing words. "He went to the sickroom while I was here in the lounge. He

saw just as he opened the door that Dr. Howell was dead."

Bolton whirled on Kent.

"How long were you out of her sight?"

"Perhaps thirty seconds," Kent Howell mumbled.

Henry's mouth made an O of distaste. That made it difficult to figure.

"Aren't you going to lock him up, Henry," a voice roared behind Bolton. "You don't usually wait for evidence."

Bolton gulped in rage, turned slightly salmon pink. A man built along the general lines of an oversized barrel stepped out from behind him. The man had a bullet head and his jaw made one think of an English bulldog. His hands, which he unconsciously bunched into fists, were the size of small hams and about as hard as well-seasoned oak. Slug Minor was Wildcat Gordon's chauffeur. Slug and Henry Bolton did not exactly care for each other.

The third man in the party was tall, dignified and wore a pointed Vandyke. He was Dr. Worth, the medical examiner. Worth ignored the quarrel and suggested a look at the body. Without further word, they pushed down the hall to the sickroom.

Dr. Stepan Howell's face was cold in death. The dark eyes were still open, still mirrored the horrible fear that had followed him for years. He was diagonally across the bed. It seemed as if he had made a last desperate struggle for life. One hand at his throat showed that he might have been fighting stragulation.

The medical examiner looked closely at the throat. He stripped the bedclothing from the thin chest; then he looked at the tongue and the inside of the mouth. He straightened.

"From a cursory examination, I should say that suffocation caused by lack of heart action caused death," he decided. "Such an incident is not unusual in heart cases. Apparently, the gravity of his condition was not realized. That, also, is not unusual."

He pointed at the oxygen tank and compressor.

"Oxygen might have saved him," he said. "But not necessarily."

Dr. Worth said that an autopsy would have to be held to confirm his findings and suggested that they leave. A voice from behind them interrupted.

The voice was oily and carried both a smirk and sneer. Henry Bolton's face displayed conflicting emotions. There was, first, an expression of dislike. That was almost inevitable. No one could possibly have actually liked the figure that glided suavely across the room. But probably overcoming the dislike in Henry's expression was one of respect for power; even the power of a racketeer at large impressed Henry. That is, if the crook had political connections.

The man who approached Henry had a head about the size and shape of a child's toy balloon. It was entirely hairless. His lack of eyebrows or lashes gave him almost a naked appearance. His mouth was a lipless gash. Conrad Sheester was a lawyer who should have been sent to Sing Sing many years before.

"I trust there is nothing untoward about Dr. Howell's death," Sheester purred softly. "Much depends upon that, you know."

Bolton shrugged as Sheester bent forward in a slight mock bow.

"No," he grunted. "The doc says it's probably natural."

Sheester rubbed his hands anew.

"Splendid. Ah, splendid," he murmured. "I represent certain factors in the settlement of the estate."

CHAPTER II.

POST-MORTEM ACCUSATION.

Gregoire Lascalles let out a throaty roar of hatred. He leaped, like some human monster, and seized Conrad Sheester by the neck. He rumbled obvious threats in a language that no one present could understand.

Slug Minor pounced on Lascalles, seized the caretaker with his huge hamlike hands. Lascalles had met more than his match in Slug Minor. Slug forced him slowly back from the now perspiring Sheester. The lawyer darted pale eyes at Lascalles. He mopped his face was a blue handkerchief and muttered his appreciation at having the human gorilla pulled off him.

"Splendid," he said silkily. "Ah, splendid."

The lawyer was known in the less pleasant fields of jurisprudence as Splendid Sheester, because of his constant use of that word. Those who knew him well, also usually pronounced the first syllable of his last name as "I" in kite.

Lascalles stood back against the wall of the room, still muttering in his strange tongue. Bolton demanded to know why he had leaped upon the oily attorney. Lascalles merely glared at Henry with his black eyes. He refused to speak at all. Bolton gave it up and turned to Splendid Sheester.

"Who're your clients, Sheester?" Henry demanded.

Sheester favored Bolton with what he considered a smile and rubbed his hands together again.

"Ah, that little matter will have to wait for a bit, my dear Bolton," Splendid purred. "Professional confidence, you know. But in time, you will be informed."

A harsh voice barked staccato suggestions into the room; everyone there whirled toward the door.

"Perhaps a little trip downtown to the goldfish room would hasten your decisions," the voice rapped. "A little bit of rubber hose in the right place would do you good."

The man who spoke was young, blue-eyed and had a square, hard jaw that really meant business. His gray, pin-striped suit might have been designed to illustrate what the well-dressed man will wear at Yale. The man scarcely looked like a cop, certainly not like a police commissioner. But it was, nevertheless, Commissioner Wildcat Gordon, whose hard-hitting unorthodox methods of solving crime frequently made politicians go gray overnight. Sheester surveyed Wildcat with pale eyes that suddenly took on an uncertain quality. He stood his ground.

"At your first illegal move, I will have your badge and your job, commissioner," he said smoothly. "And you know that is so."

Wildcat Gordon did know it. His lips were in a grim, straight line. But he let Sheester talk.

"I would suggest," the lawyer said, "that the safe-deposit vault of Dr. Howell be examined immediately. Lascalles has the key. If he will not yield it peacefully, I can get a court order tomorrow."

Lascalles muttered in his strange tongue, but he turned over the key. The bearded giant shrugged, grunted in English that it didn't matter. Wildcat's blue eyes narrowed. He decided suddenly that it might be a good idea to look at

that safe-deposit vault.

"We will wait for the morgue wagon," he snapped. "Then we will examine the vault."

Sheester smirked and minced out of the room. Lascalles muttered under his breath, said he had duties to attend to and lumbered out like some huge animal of the jungle. Bolton had already disappeared to check over the house and see if there was anyone else present who might know something about the doctor or his death.

Wildcat thought of the background of the mysterious Dr. Stepan Howell. A scientist who had always been a leader in the field of anthropology, Dr. Howell was known to have amassed a fortune. Lascalles had been with Howell for many years. The past of the caretaker was shrouded in even greater mystery than that of the scientist who was now dead. The story most commonly believed was that Howell had met Lascalles, a native of some Balkan country, in old Vienna, and had somehow fallen under the weird spell of the man. It was in Vienna, according to whispered accounts of those who had possessed the temerity to pry into Howell's affairs, that the fear first encompassed the scientist's life. From there he had gone into darkest Africa, taking Lascalles and his statuesque wife with him.

After years in the Congo jungles, Howell had returned to the United States, bringing the Lascalleses along. Also with him, he had brought the weird collection of wild beasts that were now penned up on the estate known as Howell's Acres.

Wildcat's thoughts were suddenly broken off by the nasal voice of Henry Bolton. Henry apparently had discovered someone he could browbeat.

"In there, now," Henry's voice whined. "Make it snappy! I'll soon find out who you are."

Henry shoved a slight, trembling figure into the room. It was a wanly pretty girl, about twelve years old. Large dark eyes were wide with fright. The girl was clad simply in a cotton dress. Her hair was lustrous and dark; braided and coiled about her head in a continental type of headdress. Her eyes lighted with hope when she saw the statuesque Sofia Lascalles standing motionless on the other side of the room. The little girl ran to her arms.

"Mother!" she cried. "What are these men doing here?"

Sofia Lascalles' dark eyes flamed with anger. She drew the child close to her, glared at Henry Bolton.

"Must you prey on children?" Gregoire Lascalles' wife demanded. "Is not my little girl safe even from the police?"

Bolton ran a forefinger around under his collar.

"Yours?" he asked unnecessarily.

"Of course," Sofia Lascalles snapped. "Has not one the right to possess children in your city?"

Bolton opened his mouth, gulped like a fish. He was undoubtedly going to say something. But he didn't get the chance.

A scream bubbled up from the rain-swept darkness of Howell Acres! It was a man's scream and it was packed with the imminent terror of death.

The scream came again, followed by a cry for help. So steeped in horror was that voice that recognition was impossible. Wildcat Gordon was racing from the room before the cry dropped to a wailing sob of despair. Slug Minor was close on the heels of his chief.

Wildcat and his aid tore through the wet grass and shrubs in the direction of that voice. It came from the cages of the animals. The hollow cough of a big jungle cat came from the same direction.

A police car was parked on the graveled drive between the house and the wild-beast cages. Wildcat paused, just momentarily beside it. Then he was racing on.

Lights suddenly flashed on around them. Apparently, someone had turned them on from the great house. The pale glare of the overhead floods showed them what had caused the scream of terror.

A huge Bengal tiger stood astride a huddled figure in one cage. Saliva dripped from the cruel jaws of the great beast. Slowly his head lowered, drew closer to the trembling form beneath him. The form was that of Splendid Sheester!

The lawyer showed none of his suave sneering contempt, now. His round head was wet with the cold sweat of fear. The tiger growled menacingly, opened its jaws to begin his meal.

The tiger promptly became the most scared animal in the city of New York. Bright balls of flame ripped past its nose! Hot darts of pain smashed against its side. With a tremendous roar of fright and amazement, the jungle cat abandoned his intended meal. He leaped to the high shelf that afforded him a minimum of protection and roared his protest into the night.

Wildcat Gordon barked quick orders to Slug Minor. Slug moved toward the cage, found a cleanout door and cautiously swung it open. Wildcat stood beside him. In one hand, he held a Police Positive. In the other, he held the sizzling signal flare. Gordon had been about to take a package of signal flares down to the marine division that night. They had been in his car.

Blazing like a roman candle, the brilliant balls of fire had frightened the tiger into flight. They had scared him more than hurt him. And it had saved a life.

Even if it was a life that Wildcat Gordon privately considered scarcely worth the effort.

Conrad Sheester scrambled moaning to his feet. He didn't use the word "splendid" once. He couldn't form any words at all for several minutes. Sheester had given himself up for dead. It seemed difficult for him to accustom himself to the fact that he wasn't.

"Who put you in there?" Wildcat demanded.

Sheester trembled anew.

"I . . . I don't know," he stammered. "I . . . I w-was just walking around in the d-dark when someone grabbed me."

It was difficult to tell whether Sheester was lying or not about that matter. A half-dozen overalled men were moving about in the pale gleam of the floodlights. These were workmen who had been employed by Dr. Howell to help Lascalles and to do general chores about the private zoo. They insisted that they had been playing cards in the servant's house, nearly a quarter of a mile distant, and knew nothing about it.

At that moment the police morgue wagon roared up to remove Dr. Howell's body for a medical examiner's autopsy. Splendid Sheester pulled himself together enough to remind Wildcat that the safe-deposit box ought be examined.

"Suppose it gets rifled because you delay," he suggested. "Then you would be in a bad spot."

Wildcat did not answer. He went back to the house, arranged for the

removal of the body. Then, with Sheester, Slug and Bolton, he set out for the bank. Wildcat carried a large black brief case.

Kent Howell and the Lascalles gave the appearance of having no interest in the proceedings. Kent insisted he was too broken up about his brother's death to care what the safe-deposit box revealed. Wildcat asked Sheester a question concerning Kent.

"Isn't it true that there has been plenty of trouble between Kent and the doctor?" he demanded.

Splendid Sheester shrugged.

"All over the dam," he said. "Kent was there to make up with him."

There was no further conversation until they reached the bank. Wildcat had previously called an official of the small suburban institution and explained the reasons for breaking into the box at such an unseemly hour. The official had been glad to co-operate.

Sheester maintained that Howell kept the bulk of his wealth in this strong box in the form of cash and negotiable securities. The bank official met them at the door of his institution. He was a meek, inoffensive little man.

The safe-deposit boxes were below ground level. There were row upon row of boxes of various sizes. The largest one in the little suburban bank belonged to the late Dr. Stepan Howell. The door yielded easily to the key Lascalles had surrendered. An obvious reason for his disinterest in the vault was immediately apparent.

There was not so much as a dollar bill in the largest safe-deposit box in the bank. There was not a bond, not a mortgage, not a security of any kind. Only one piece of paper was in evidence on the floor of the box. Wildcat picked it up; it read:

To whom it may concern:

This is to certify that my brother, Kent Howell, once having attempted my life, is never to have access to any wealth or estate that may accrue to my heir or heirs upon my death. Any will that should subsequently be discovered, awarding anything whatsoever to Kent Howell, will be a forgery and should be turned over to the district attorney for investigation.

Stepan Howell.

CHAPTER III.

DEATH BY THE KNIFE!

The document was notarized. It was of sufficient recent date to have been fresh in the mind of Dr. Howell at the time he died. In addition to that, an accompanying statement on the sheet of paper, signed by a well-known brain specialist, testified that Dr. Stepan Howell was of sound mind when he wrote and signed the document!

Splendid Sheester gasped. He mopped his bulging forehead again with the bright-blue handkerchief.

"Splen—" he began from force of habit. "No, damn it, it isn't splendid. It's awful."

Wildcat's hard-blue eyes surveyed the lawyer.

"Why is it awful to you?" he demanded.

Splendid hesitated. Then, with an air of one who has decided to make a clean breast of everything, he said: "Kent was my client. And I said *was.*"

Splendid was silent for a moment. Then he looked at the empty safe-deposit vault. He softly called Kent Howell a great many words that are not used in polite society.

It was quite obvious that the emptiness of the safe was a greater cause of anguish to Splendid Shee-

ster than any trickery of which Kent Howell might have been guilty.

"I shall return to Howell Acres and inform him that I can no longer handle his case," Sheester said softly.

The lawyer stalked majestically out of the bank. Wildcat did not stop him. He turned to Bolton and Slug Minor.

"You two take this document to headquarters," he directed. "Then return to the estate. I may need you there."

Slug Minor drew his face into an expression of mourning. He shifted a large book he carried under his arm into a more comfortable position.

"Do I have to put up with this guy?" he moaned, jerking one thumb at Bolton.

Then, without waiting for an answer or the howl of protest from Henry, he added.

"Come on, then, my cerebrovaccuumed friend. Get on your iron horse."

Bolton gulped at Slug Minor's use of the self-coined word, then flushed at the implication that he was lacking in brain matter. Slug Minor's addiction to words he had just discovered in the dictionary that he was seldom without were a constant source of misery for Henry. All of which was just so much grist to Slug's mill. The bullet-headed giant was well aware of Bolton's unceasing efforts to succeed Wildcat. Slug never let an opportunity go past to take a dig at the long-nosed deputy.

Back in the days when Wildcat Gordon was a mere first-grade detective, Slug had been a water-front roustabout, stevedore and truck driver. There had been a huge silk robbery where Slug had been working. Believing Slug was as dumb as he looked, the robbers framed him for the job. And Slug Minor knew that if it hadn't been for the ceaseless work and complete faith of Wildcat Gordon, he would have gone up the river for it.

Slug's constant efforts to improve his diction and forget the water front sometimes produced weird word combinations. As he went out, he saluted Wildcat.

"O. K., chief," he acknowledged. "I'll keep the mutt out of turbulence."

Wildcat Gordon smiled slightly; Slug could start plenty of trouble, but as for keeping anyone out of it, he wasn't a safe bet. Wildcat had sent them back to headquarters because he wanted both of them out of the way for a brief spell. The commissioner had many things to do.

He was well aware that there were many dirty undertones in this strange case; more than simply a fight for the cash value of an estate. There was still fear and hatred in this thing somewhere, and Wildcat Gordon meant to find out where.

The stocky commissioner turned a corner swiftly. He looked behind him once. Then he faded into an alley between two darkened buildings. His hands were busy as he walked. The brief case at his side snapped open. A queer pair of dental plates came out, and he thrust them quickly into his mouth. His chin became oddly pointed. Wildcat's breath hissed between those dental plates in an eerie whisper.

Greenish transparent contact lenses were next in his hands. They covered the bright-blue pupils of Wildcat's eyes, made them green and baleful. Black powder made the wavy blond hair smooth and black. The black clothes that covered his own completed the transformation.

For Wildcat Gordon was The Whisperer!

The ghostlike nemesis of the underworld was in reality a disguise for the hard-hitting commissioner. As The Whisperer, there were no rules, no red tape—and no interfering politicians to decree how a case should be solved.

The whispering chuckle of the black-clad fighter drifted through the alley as he strode rapidly away from the bank. The Whisperer was going to get some answers in this mystery; he was going to discover, if he could, the strange motives that underlay the death, fear and hatred he had seen that night.

The Whisperer was sure now that the autopsy report would show that Dr. Howell had died of natural causes. But he was also sure that the eminent anthropologist had been murdered. How, The Whisperer did not know. Nor did he know who had removed from that large bank vault the fortune that Dr. Stepan Howell had possessed.

Splendid Sheester, Kent Howell and the weird, uncommunicative Lascalles were all involved in this thing somewhere. The foe of crime did not believe that ordinary measures of police procedure would be enough to untangle that skein of murder yarn.

The first destination of The Whisperer was a tall office building in the lower part of Manhattan. The watchman in the lobby thought he saw a dim figure flit past the door. A scratching sound attracted his attention to a side entrance. The watchman investigated that and failed to see the vaguely discernible form that slipped up the emergency stairs.

The door before which The Whisperer paused was on the fourth floor. The inscription on the frosted glass said:

CONRAD SHEESTER
Attorney at Law

A skeleton key slipped easily into the lock, admitted The Whisperer to a well-furnished office.

He was silent as he went systematically through filing cabinets and drawers. Then he found one file that interested him. A soft, ghostly chuckle filled the offices of Splendid Sheester. The Whisperer had discovered that Kent Howell was not the only client of Sheester's who was interested in the wealth of Dr. Stepan Howell.

The first exhibit of interest was a carbon copy of a letter sent by Sheester to a Joseph Mindler in a small town in New Jersey. The letter informed Mindler that, as a nephew of Dr. Stepan Howell, he was the closest kin next to Kent. The second letter was one written by Joe Mindler to Sheester. It was apparently an innocent missive of thanks, expressing appreciation on the part of the writer for Sheester's efforts in bringing him in contact with members of his family. In neither letter was there any mention of money or of the estate.

The Whisperer was chuckling softly as he left Splendid Sheester's office. He drifted out of the office building and through the darkened streets of New York's financial districts. On the edge of West Street, he found a dingy cigar store with a phone booth. In the booth, he removed the odd dental plates and barked questions in the harsh, staccato tones of Wildcat Gordon. He called the medical examiner and asked for the Howell autopsy report.

As he had expected, the report showed that Dr. Stepan Howell had

died of natural causes, suffering from a heart attack.

The Whisperer replaced the dental plates and drifted again into the night. A block away he had parked a fast black coupé. He found this and sped back to Howell Acres on the north shore of Long Island. He left his car a safe distance from the grounds and padded softly toward the lighted windows of the great house.

In the huge living room, he could see Kent Howell and the two Lascalles. Gregoire Lascalles was talking animatedly. He shrugged, turned on his heel and strode to the door. In another moment the blackness of the rainy night had swallowed Lascalles.

The Whisperer moved silently in the direction he believed Lascalles had taken. The burly, bearded caretaker seemed to have many strange missions that took him out into the night. The Whisperer desired to learn what they were. But he was not destined on this occasion to succeed!

There was no fight. There wasn't time. A bludgeon whizzed out of the blackness, crunched against the skull of the half-visible figure of The Whisperer! Breath, expelled by the shock of the blow, hissed between his teeth. Then the nemesis of crime slumped to the ground.

Instinctively, The Whisperer fought against the blackness that swept his brain. He vaguely felt himself being carried, like a ship on a storm-tossed ocean. Then consciousness ebbed from his mind and there was only blackness!

The battler from the underworld was still struggling when consciousness crept back into his brain. He was in complete darkness. Some other figure was struggling beside him. As he rolled, he felt the flesh and clothing of a fellow prisoner.

The muscles of The Whisperer's wrists were so highly developed that they were almost as big around as the compact hands themselves. The hands were double-jointed. He tensed his muscles, expanded his wrists to the maximum. Then he relaxed them, twisted his fists to free the ropes that bound him. Whoever had tied him had not done an expert job. In a short time, The Whisperer

THE WHISPERER

● A low, mirthless chuckle, an awesome whisper of defiance, as a half-visible wraith moves through the night. Criminals flee at this eerie challenge, for it announces the arrival of the mysterious nemesis of crime, for whom there are no rules or regulations deterrent in the path of justice—The Whisperer.

was free. He whipped the pencil flash from his pocket and bathed his fellow prisoner with a pale-white beam of light.

He saw beside him the round, hairless head of Splendid Sheester! The lawyer was not tied as tightly as had been The Whisperer.

Sheester was busy spitting a gag from between his teeth. Finally he managed it. His first words were filled with indignation.

"Someone will pay for this," Sheester muttered. "They can't do this to me and get away with it."

While he spoke, Sheester twisted and tugged at his bonds. They came loose and Sheester stood up, still muttering threats against the persons who had tied him. The Whisperer gathered from his words that he did not know who it was. Or, if he did, he was not permitting that fact to become known.

The Whisperer looked about their prison, found that it was an ordinary double-doored garage. The doors were not locked. The dark foe of crime swung them open. Then he turned to survey the round-headed attorney.

Circumstances, however, discouraged conversation between the two. The first circumstance was the startled scream of a woman from the direction of the main house. The second was the faint wail of sirens in the distance. The Whisperer knew that the wail of sirens was, in all probability, Bolton and Slug Minor returning.

The scream, he decided, should be investigated before the police arrived. With Sheester close behind him, the ghostlike figure raced across the wet grass toward the house. He did not get the opportunity of entering the house ahead of Bolton and Slug Minor. The department car roared up the drive.

Sheester pounded on into the house. The Whisperer, glided silently to the side of the building and eased himself through a flower bed under the big window of the main living room. He raised himself high enough to look in.

It was obviously Sofia Lascalles who had screamed. Apparently, she had reason to exhibit some emotion. The regally beautiful wife of the caretaker was crouched in the center of the room. In her right hand she held a gleaming knife! The blade was well smeared with red.

Below Sofia Lascalles, huddled and motionless, was the form of gaunt, dissipated Kent Howell! From the gaping wound above Kent Howell's heart, The Whisperer deduced that at least one heir to the fortune of the Anthropologist was well out of the running.

There was little question that Kent Howell was dead!

Splendid Sheester raced into the room as Sofia stood crouched over the body with the murder weapon in her hand. Sheester immediately hauled out his blue handkerchief and began to mop his glistening dome.

"My client's been murdered," he squawked. "You did it!"

Sofia Lascalles swung slowly around to confront Splendid Sheester. In her dark eyes there was an expression difficult to analyze. She made no immediate denial of the charge. That was a fact which seemed immediately to convince Sheester.

"See?" he screamed to no one in particular, "She doesn't even deny she killed him!"

Bolton and Slug Minor stamped into the room at that moment. Henry's mouth began to gulp when

he saw the body. Then he listened to Sheester's story. The lawyer said he had been knocked out while crossing the lawn. He told Henry about being tied and regaining consciousness to find himself in a garage with The Whisperer. Then he described Sofia's reaction when he found her with the knife.

At the mention of The Whisperer's name, Bolton began to rant.

"We'll find out he has something to do with this," he whined nasally. "He's always sticking his nose in things."

Slug Minor grunted.

"Yeah!" he growled. "An' if you stay on the case, he'll probably have to enucleate the problem for y'u."

Bolton snarled, began to scream orders.

"Take her to headquarters. Get her kid; bring her along. And grab her husband if you can find him. My bet is that you can't."

Slug went on a prowl. He found the wan child, Karen Lascalles. But he did not find the bearded, menacing Gregoire. Splendid Sheester began to do some theorizing.

"Either she killed him or she's covering up for that husband of hers," Sheester offered.

"Why?" Slug Minor demanded. Slug had long felt that the State game commission should have declared an open season on Splendid Sheester.

"I bet there's a will and these people don't want it found," the lawyer purred.

Slug Minor looked sharply at Sofia Lascalles. The woman's dark eyes gave no indication of her thoughts. They were now cold, lusterless. The child huddled close to her mother as Bolton shoved them toward the police car.

Slug and Sheester followed.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER HEIR ARRIVES.

An eerie, chuckling whisper followed Slug and Bolton out of Howell Acres. The Whisperer was turning many queer angles over in his mind.

Why had Kent Howell been murdered?

If the killer had been solely interested in removing a claimant to the estate—assuming that the riches comprising that estate were found—he had apparently acted in ignorance. The document found in the safe-deposit vault had seemed to dispose of Kent as an heir.

Or perhaps Kent Howell knew something that would injure the plan of one of the oddly assorted figures that were moving in this drama. Perhaps he knew where there was a will that would do harm to someone else. Perhaps he knew the real motive that was driving someone to further crime in order to hide the reason for the fear that had haunted Dr. Stepan Howell for more than a decade.

Another name flitted through the crime fighter's mind as he began to prowl the house. That was Joe Mindler, the nephew who had turned up in New Jersey. Who was Mindler? Could he have eliminated a rival he believed to overshadow him in the right to claim Stepan Howell's estate?

The Whisperer did not know. He had not yet encountered Joe Mindler.

With a soft chuckle, he began a systematic search of the great house. Everything seemed in order until he reached a huge room on the second floor. This apparently had been a combination laboratory and consulting office for Dr. Howell.

The place was a shambles. Desks

were turned upside down. Papers were scattered all about the floor. Someone quite obviously had been searching frantically for something.

The Whisperer's green eyes flickered oddly. Two things might have been the object of that search. One of them might have been a will showing the disposition of the wealth of Dr. Howell. The other might have been some indication of where that wealth was hidden.

On one side of the room, The Whisperer found a door that was locked. A skeleton key from his pocket opened that. Inside, he found what might have been an elaborate frame to establish innocence. Or the man might really have been attacked and tied by someone who meant business.

Gregoire Lascalles lay huddled in a narrow closet. His wrists and ankles had been tied. A gag was thrust into his mouth. In addition to that, Lascalles was unconscious. There was a raised welt on his forehead.

The Whisperer pulled the huge figure of the bearded giant out into the room. He untied the wrists and ankles and removed the gag from Lascalles' thick lips. Lascalles was still unconscious. The Whisperer hauled him onto a leather couch against one wall of the office-laboratory. Then he turned again to survey the room.

One object that had previously escaped his attention caught his eye. It was a photograph, peeping out of a corner of a drawer in the big desk. The Whisperer pulled it out, scrutinized it.

A pale, beautiful woman looked out at him from the faded print. She had been young when that photograph was taken. From the hairdress and the clothes, The Whisperer judged that picture had been snapped somewhere around 1929. The husky whisper that issued from his lips carried an odd note of question. There was something in that picture that was somewhat familiar; something that told The Whisperer that here was an important thread in the queer pattern of events that was weaving crime and murder around Howell Acres!

The Whisperer concentrated upon that faded photograph; tried to fathom the secret his brain kept telling him was there. He was so absorbed that he failed to hear the first, faint stirring of gorillalike Gregoire Lascalles.

Lascalles' black eyes blinked slowly when the first return of consciousness flickered in his brain. He appeared to be trying to remember just what had happened to him. Suddenly, his eyes focused on the black form of The Whisperer.

Lascalles shook his head. Then he saw what it was that occupied The Whisperer. The bearded man's face contorted suddenly. Both rage and fear were manifest in the bellow that issued from his thick lips.

The Whisperer whirled just as Lascalles reached him. The burly giant slammed out with one huge fist, smashed the slighter man across the temple with bony knuckles. The other hand whipped out, snatched at the faded photograph of the pale, dark-eyed woman. The picture ripped.

The Whisperer crouched, came up with small compact fists full of dynamite. He rocked Lascalles with blows that amazed the mammoth foreigner. A one-two punch to the solar plexus sent Lascalles reeling. Bloody foam flecked his bearded lips; he staggered backward, flung out an arm to catch himself. The arm swept across a large workbench

loaded with bottles, vials, retorts and chemicals.

Glass crashed and varicolored liquids dribbled to the floor. Gregoire roared in renewed fury and plunged back at The Whisperer. His huge bulk caught the smaller man. A huge fist again smashed against the side of The Whisperer's head, staggered him.

The Whisperer went down slowly. As he did, he stuck out one foot, hooked it behind Lascalles' leg. The big man tripped and fell. As he fell, The Whisperer's fists pistoned like small locomotive drive rods. Lascalles grunted in pain and anger, tried to roll free.

It was then that the two noticed the blaze beneath the laboratory bench! The flames were reddish, weird. The chemicals Lascalles had tipped over in his effort to regain his balance had caused the fire. It swept through the room, sweeping everything inflammable before it!

Lascalles roared in new fear. He spoke English this time with a heavy gutteral accent.

"Get out!" he rumbled. "This room is fireproofed if we shut the door."

The Whisperer struggled to his feet, followed the bearded giant out of the door. Lascalles swung the door shut. Then he moved with surprising swiftness. Before The Whisperer could intercept him, he darted directly into what looked like a solid wall.

A panel in the wall swung open and swallowed Lascalles like some giant trap. The Whisperer lunged after the big man, slammed against the closing panel. The wall now presented one continuous hard surface.

The Whisperer chuckled softly. The reactions of the burly servant of Dr. Howell hinted certain things to him. He was certain that whoever had ransacked that laboratory-office had been seeking the will of the dead Dr. Howell. Whether the burglar had been seeking it to use or to destroy it, he did not know.

Lascalles had apparently been certain that no will was in this room. His only words of anger were directed at The Whisperer's possession of the picture of the pale and beautiful wóman. Lascalles had also been entirely unconcerned about the visit to the safe-deposit vault.

So, The Whisperer reasoned, if Lascalles was so certain that the will would *not* be found, it was quite likely that he knew where it was hidden!

The faint whisper died on his lips as the nemesis of crime drifted out of the building. Looking behind him, he could see no signs of the fire in the laboratory-office. Apparently, the fire was confined in the fireproof room and would die out without further damage to the big house.

The Whisperer padded noiselessly out into the night. He moved softly toward the cages of the animals. The beasts were more quiet, now. Occasionally, a baboon or a chimpanzee would bark plaintively. The big jungle cats coughed hoarsely into the night. Then, between those minor interruptions, the night was quiet. It was in one of those periods that The Whisperer heard a branch snap.

Swiftly, the wraithlike figure glided toward that sound. He crouched, almost invisible in the night. His sharp ears caught the sound of a heavy figure padding through the wet grass. Silently, The Whisperer followed. The heavy footsteps led him out behind the house into a small orchard of

apple trees. Then they halted.

A tiny flash flickered once; then it was sheltered by a hairy paw. A grunt of satisfaction drifted through the air. The flash glowed faintly once more. The Whisperer saw the bearded features of Gregoire Lascalles. A faint scraping sound came from where he crouched. Then the big man straightened, strode off into the night.

Green eyes flared strangely as the mysterious foe of crime waited for Lascalles to get out of earshot. Then he crept silently to the spot where the big man had crouched. His own pencil flash snapped on, showed a small space on the ground where earth had been recently disturbed.

A flat stick lay nearby. The Whisperer picked it up and began to dig. The earth was soft, yielded easily to the makeshift spade. A foot beneath the surface, the stick struck metal. A soft chuckle of success came from The Whisperer. In another moment, his compact hands encircled a round metal container and brought it to the surface.

The can, about a foot long and three inches in diameter, was sealed with a waterproof wax. Chuckling softly, The Whisperer broke the seal and lifted off the cover. Inside were three rolled sheets of a gelatinous substance. The Whisperer pulled them out played the pale beam of his flash over them. The sheets were entirely transparent. The flash revealed no markings of any sort on them. Apparently, they were completely blank.

The ghostlike crime fighter was completely absorbed in his discovery. These were no blank and unimportant sheets of gelatin. The Whisperer was certain of that. Gregoire Lascalles would not have taken such care to assure their safety from prying eyes unless they had great value.

Here, he was certain, he held one key to the mystery of Howell Acres. Here—

The Whisperer was suddenly bathed in the brilliance of a powerful flashlight beam. A grating voice broke the silence of the night.

"What's going on here? Where is everybody? Who're you, anyway?"

The man with the flashlight committed an error then. He jumped quickly toward The Whisperer. The wraithlike figure leaped toward the newcomer and smashed a fist against a jaw that proved to have a certain glasslike quality. The man with the flashlight went down with a groan.

"Say," he mumbled, "you don't have to kill a guy."

The Whisperer turned his own flashlight on the man. He was a fairly large, well-developed individual. That is, from a standpoint of physique. His gaping mouth and weak blue eyes did not seem to indicate a great deal of intelligence. He had practically no chin at all.

"Who are you?" The Whisperer asked in a low tone. "And what do you want on Howell Acres?"

"Who? Me?" the weak-eyed newcomer asked as if in surprise. "Why, I'm Joe Mindler. I came to see my uncle. Where is he?"

"Your uncle," The Whisperer informed him, "is dead!"

Joe Mindler gulped, blinked his eyes as if they bothered him.

"Huh?" he mumbled. "Dead? Gee! He had a lot of money, I guess. Maybe I can quit my job, now."

Joe Mindler struggled to his feet. He sounded neither surprised nor as if he had expected such information. Mentally, he seemed to be principally

vegetable. He twisted around, trying to straighten out his suit. Whoever had sold him that garment must have seen him coming for quite a distance. It looked like a special for a boy from the country. Tight, high-water pants and a high-buttoned coat made him look like the answer to a shell-game operator's dream.

Joe Mindler arched his head forward, strained his weak eyes to see The Whisperer.

"Gee," he muttered. "Who're you, the butler?"

Either Mindler had never seen a butler or he was shrewdly clever in a dumb-appearing fashion; either completely stupid or smart enough to bear a lot of watching.

The Whisperer looked him over closely for a moment.

"Come," he said presently. "We will go down to police headquarters. I believe Splendid Sheester will be there."

Joe Mindler looked almost conscious for a moment.

"Sheester?" he said. "The lawyer? Swell. He's the guy who told me I ought to look up my uncle. Worth a lot of money, he told me. He said I could get off the farm, maybe. You think so?"

The Whisperer did not answer. He propelled Joe Mindler down the driveway and toward his black coupé. He climbed in and motioned Joe to get in beside him. Then he placed the round metal container in the dashboard compartment.

"What y'u got there?" Joe inquired. "Must be important, all sealed up that way."

The Whisperer was silent for several moments as he tooled his speedy coupé in toward Manhattan. Then he decided upon a plan of action. If this youth were as gullible and dumb as he pretended to be, he would tell everyone he encountered all that he knew. If he were not; if he were covering shrewdness with his hayseed appearance, he also would be useful in repeating information The Whisperer wanted the master criminals to have.

"I think it is valuable," the crime fighter said. "I am known as The Whisperer, and I believe I am getting close to the solution of something big."

"Gee!" Joe Mindler gulped. "That's swell."

The Whisperer sped over the Queensboro Bridge and downtown toward Centre Street. He parked a block away from headquarters and pointed to the main entrance.

"Go down there and ask for Henry Bolton," he instructed. "Tell the boys you saw me. They'll be interested."

Joe Mindler tipped his hat awkwardly and swung his gangling frame down the street. A soft, whispering chuckle followed him. It seemed that the loose-jointed farm youth shuddered involuntarily.

CHAPTER V.

LIVE BAIT.

From the other side of the street, The Whisperer followed Joe Mindler for half a block. Then the half-visible foe of crime disappeared entirely. He vanished in a labyrinth of small buildings and went by a circuitous route to a room directly opposite police headquarters. From his window, he could look upon the office of Police Commissioner Wildcat Gordon.

The Whisperer was chuckling softly as he pulled down the shade and turned on the light. He looked through a peephole in the shade and into the lighted office of Wildcat

Gordon. There were four figures in the room.

Henry Bolton, Slug Minor and Splendid Sheester were seated around Wildcat's desk. In the center of the room, a tall, gaunt individual stalked back and forth. The man was totally bald except for two tufts of gray hair that stuck up over his ears. He was slightly stooped, as if peering ahead into perpetual gloom.

The squinting eyes under bushy brows accentuated that appearance. It seemed as if the man were afflicted with impaired eyesight and could not see what was going on around him. But the contrary was true. Retired Deputy Richard Traeger, better known as old Quick Trigger, missed very little that was on the surface or hidden by the artifices of the underworld.

The Whisperer chuckled as he watched old Quick pace up and down. He picked up a pair of earphones that were connected to a dictaphone in the office and listened in on the conversation.

"Let them sit in the waiting room for a while," Bolton whined. "I'll send the woman to the River precinct. We'll make her talk."

"What about the girl?" Quick Trigger rumbled in a voice that shook the walls. "She's nothing but a kid."

The Whisperer did not wait to hear Bolton's reply. He had some ideas on that subject, himself. One finger removed his dental plates and he barked into a phone in the tones of Wildcat Gordon. He got Quick Trigger on the wire.

"Phone Tiny," he barked. "I'd like to have her take temporary custody of a twelve-year-old girl whose mother is being held for questioning."

Tiny Traeger was the dark-haired, pert daughter of old Quick Trigger. A diminutive bundle of compact beauty, she had the power to upset Wildcat's equilibrium more than he would ever admit.

While Quick was speaking to Wildcat, a door behind opened and gawky Joe Mindler was ushered into Bolton's presence.

"Tell Henry I'll be right over," Wildcat snapped.

Quick Trigger grunted and hung

Sofia Lascalles crouched over the still body, a blood-smeared knife in her hand. She did not deny Sheester's charge as he told his story to Slug Minor and Bolton.

up. Wildcat took off the disguise of The Whisperer and left his hideaway. He stepped from the room in his gray, pin-striped suit. The metal container, wrapped loosely in newspapers to disguise it, was under his arm.

As he passed through the waiting room to his office, he found Sofia Lascalles and Karen sitting there. Wildcat paused and spoke briskly to the woman.

"You are to be held for questioning," he said. "Meanwhile, your daughter will be cared for by a girl who is a very dear friend of mine. Do not worry about her."

Sofia Lascalles flashed a grateful glance at Wildcat. But she still did not seem ready to do any talking.

"That, at least, is something," she said. "The rest I can put up with."

Wildcat nodded his head and went on into his office. Sheester was talking to Joe Mindler. The gangling country youth chewed a matchstick; he seemed highly pleased with himself.

"Gee!" he said. "Y'u mean I'll get it all—the whole works?"

Splendid Sheester rubbed his hands together in open glee. If he were involved in these murderous series of crimes, he seemed extremely sure of himself.

"Quite right," he purred. "Quite right. There was no will. You are the only heir." Sheester fairly beamed with pleasure. "Splendid. Ah, but it is splendid."

Wildcat cocked his head on one side, one eyebrow raised slightly.

"If there is any estate, Splendid," he reminded. "We haven't found it yet, you know."

Sheester's face immediately lost its smug appearance. He muttered something beneath his breath.

Wildcat turned to Joe Mindler.

"How'd you happen to get down to headquarters?" he asked.

Joe Mindler gulped.

"Huh? Gee. I nearly forgot. A guy named The Whisperer. He said to tell you; said he knew a lot of things about something or other."

The effect of that was electric.

Bolton leaped to his feet, began to yell for reserves and riot guns. Splendid Sheester turned and looked speculatively at his client. The look on his face expressed a wonder that anyone could be as dumb as Mindler seemed to be.

In the confusion, Wildcat Gordon nodded to Quick Trigger and led the way out of the room.

Wildcat strode quickly to a rear stairway and climbed rapidly to the top floor of the building. There, hidden away in a dusty corner, he had installed a tiny private radio-experimental room and chemical laboratory. No one except Quick Trigger and Slug Minor was allowed there without Wildcat's being present.

In the room, he and Quick Trigger began a detailed examination of the gelatinous sheets The Whisperer had found in the can back of Stepan Howell's big house. The sheets proved to be of a gelatin base. Even a little heat would destroy them. No chemicals that Wildcat tried brought out anything.

"Try the ultraviolet ray," Quick suggested. "That might work."

Wildcat nodded. That had been the next item on his list to try. He pulled out the ultraviolet-ray projector and spread the gelatinous sheets below it. He snapped the projector on and the other lights in the room out.

Immediately a graceful longhand script fluoresced in purple lines under the ultraviolet rays. Each of

the three sheets was identical. The longhand script was obviously in the hand of Dr. Stepan Howell. The terms of a very brief will were outlined.

The will was simple and to the point. It bequeathed all physical possessions owned by Dr. Stepan Howell to Karen Lascalles, twelve-year-old daughter of his caretaker!

Quick Trigger gasped in astonishment.

"There's something queer about that bird, Gregoire Lascalles," he rumbled. "I've heard about him before. He's had some sort of queer hypnotic influence over Dr. Howell. There's something here that's not quite natural."

Wildcat Gordon was scarcely listening. He was thinking of something else.

"The will gives everything to the girl," he agreed. "But it still doesn't tell what the estate consists of, nor where it is. The house and grounds on Long Island are mortgaged heavily. Howell had a reputation for wanting all his assets in cash so he could get at them quickly."

Quick squinted at Wildcat and scratched his bald dome.

"Yeah," he rumbled. "He always seemed afraid he'd leave someplace in a hell of a hurry. Just plain scared."

Wildcat Gordon's blue eyes narrowed. Several angles of the case did not add up. There did not seem to be any reason for Lascalles to hide a will that gave everything to his daughter. Nor did there seem to be sanity in his hiding the assets of the estate when he could get them legally under the terms of this will.

Then the murder of Kent Howell presented another weird angle. Presumably, the only person who could have believed he would gain by that murder would have been Joe Mindler, the nephew. And that was made entirely unnecessary by the document found in the safe-deposit box.

"Someone wants this will badly," Wildcat snapped. "Either to use it or to destroy it. If it is known that The Whisperer has this will, I think the killers will come to him."

Wildcat began rolling up the gelatin sheets. Quick Trigger began to rumble words of protest. Quick Trigger often regretted his part in the creation of The Whisperer. A master of disguise, old Quick had manufactured the odd dental plates that gave the mystery foe of crime the queerly pointed chin and the chilling whisper of a voice. Quick was the only man alive who knew that Wildcat was The Whisperer.

Quick regretted all that because he was certain that someday The Whisperer would get himself in a spot from which he would not emerge alive.

So Quick protested. But Wildcat shook his head, strode out and toward the hide-away across the street. The Whisperer was going to set a trap for a killer—with himself as live bait!

CHAPTER VI.

KIDNAPED EVIDENCE.

The nemesis of crime chuckled hoarsely as he adjusted the green contact disks to his eyes. He drew back the corners of the eyes with tiny pieces of invisible tape to give them the slanted, Oriental appearance. His long-chinned face was white against the blackness of his clothing. A dim, ghostlike figure, he drifted from this hangout over to the Hudson River water front. Under one arm, he carried the metal container he had found buried on Howell Acres.

A soft chuckle of defiance issued

from the crime fighter's lips as he wandered from one saloon to another. At each stop, he whispered to bartenders or to stooges of the underworld who lounged about. Each time it was the same challenge.

He hinted that he had found a hidden will of tremendous value; said it would dispose of a great sum of money. The Whisperer had it now, he chuckled, and anyone who wanted that document would have to get it from him. The price, he whispered, would be plenty.

The dim figure seemed to vanish entirely each time he would leave some slimy dive of the underworld. Then he would reappear in another joint, blocks away. He picked his spots; ones where he knew tongues would wag rapidly to big shots in crime who might pay well for such information.

Gradually, the wraithlike man worked his way up the water front. He was soon padding softly beneath the Express Highway that carried traffic swiftly north and south through Manhattan.

Up here was an ancient tenement building that had long served its intended purposes. It was condemned, now—a dingy, broken skeleton of a building. For some reason, the owner of that old structure did not tear it down. His investment was falling to pieces before his eyes, but he did nothing to improve it.

The reason for that was, that Wildcat Gordon owned that building under another name. In it were quarters where the underworld knew The Whisperer could sometimes be found. There, tipsters of the underworld brought information of value to The Whisperer. There, also, beaten creatures of the half-world who wanted an opportunity to straighten out their lives could find help. Many men and women who had been forced into crime because they had not had an opportunity to become decent citizens received that opportunity from the mysterious person who was the underworld's most potent foe.

It was in this building that the ghostlike fighter went now. He was certain he would have visitors there. What he did not quite expect was that the visitors would arrive before he did. The grapevine telegraph of the underworld had acted more quickly than The Whisperer had foreseen.

The musty-smelling building was silent and cold as the enemy of crime climbed softly to the apartments that he used as his lair. There was an outer room and several inner chambers that normally offered escape to The Whisperer if he were trapped.

But this time he did not get halfway across the outer room before he was set upon! Thugs swooped out of the darkness from all directions. Blackjacks and bludgeons whizzed through the air. The Whisperer ducked and dodged. Blackjacks intended for him smashed against the skulls of other crooks! Yells of pain and rage filled the room.

The attackers were afraid to use guns for fear of mowing down their own ranks in the dark. That was not true with The Whisperer. The now invisible battler whipped out his supersilenced pistols and spewed blue flame and lead into the ranks of the killers.

Dying screams came from some of them. Others scrambled, yelling hoarsely, toward the door and freedom. One of them seemed to have more brains than the others.

"Lights, you fools," he yelled. "Lights! We can't beat this guy in the dark. He'll get us all."

The Whisperer recognized the grating voice of Angel Nigren, who had led the mob against him back at Howell Acres when he had first arrived there!

Flashlights flicked on, bathing The Whisperer with light. His silenced guns hissed as he blazed away at them. Some of the lights shattered and went out. But the thugs holding them were crouched behind door jambs.

And other lights kept The Whisperer spotted, an easy prey to the rest of the killers. An avalanche struck him from behind. The stocky battler dropped, clutched at a piece of floor molding against one wall. He twisted it and a trap dropped open. The black-clad fighter hurtled downward into a black void. But a dozen killers hurtled downward with him!

The Whisperer landed flat on his back. Two heavy thugs landed full on top of him. The wind *whooshed* out of his lungs, and his brain began to whirl. With a tremendous effort, he forced himself to his feet. He knew the odds against him were greater than he could handle.

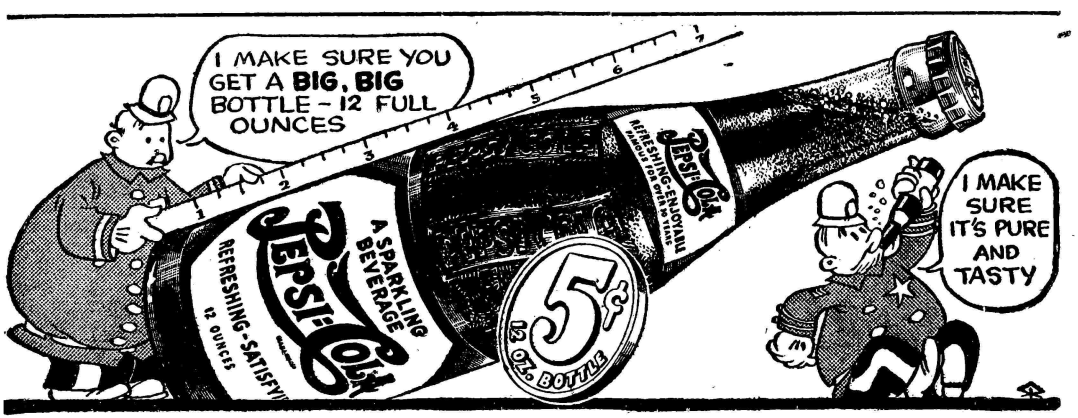
He stumbled to one wall, fumbled until he found a hidden button. He pressed it. Far away, he knew, that would ring a bell in a penthouse atop a Hudson River warehouse. In that apartment, by prearrangement, old Quick Trigger would receive that message. He would know it was a plea for assistance from The Whisperer. The wraithlike scrapper was not concerned about himself. But among these thugs lay the only chance he knew to find out what was behind the mystery that surrounded the murder of Dr. Stepan Howell. For he was certain that it had been murder!

Quick would come on the run when he heard that bell—if he were home to hear it. And he would come with picked men whom he could trust and depend on as fighters.

The Whisperer lunged outward into the room after he had pressed that button. Between then and the time help should arrive, he would guarantee a good accounting of himself.

Old Quick was home when the bell shrilled. He leaped to his feet with a rumbling, "Damn!" The girl who was curled up on the divan looked inquiringly at old Quick. The girl was Tiny Traeger. She was as pretty as anyone would want to find. Her eyes were large and expressive. It was her eyes that gave Wildcat Gordon the greatest amount of trouble.

Sometimes he knew they were



JAMES "WILDCAT" GORDON

● Wildcat Gordon, New York's youngest police commissioner, is known for his hard-hitting, unorthodox methods for solving crime. As The Whisperer, there are no rules, no interfering politicians to decree how a case is to be solved and slow the swift path of justice.

blue. At other times they were as gray as the slaty surface of the Atlantic underneath approaching storm clouds. At other times they were green. It was when they were that way that Wildcat got out of the way.

"Jehosephat!" Quick rumbled, and leaped to a phone.

Quick got Slug Minor at headquarters.

"Come as fast as you can get there," Quick roared into the phone. "And don't bring anybody except picked men. I'll meet you there."

Quick gave Slug the address of the ancient tenement. He didn't tell him about The Whisperer. All Quick said was that it was a five-alarm emergency and to get there fast.

Quick strapped on a brace of revolvers somewhat resembling the grave-scratchers of the early West. When those guns went off they sounded almost as loud as sixteen-inch naval guns. Tiny Traeger followed Quick to the elevator, barraging him with questions.

Quick did not answer his daughter. He did not want to tell her about The Whisperer. Both he and Wildcat had agreed that was a secret too dangerous for anyone else but themselves to know.

Wildcat Gordon's father had been police commissioner when Wildcat was scarcely more than a kid. The elder Gordon had always fumed at the red tape and political interference that beset his job. Quick Trigger had been the elder Gordon's closest friend. When Wildcat grew up and became New York's youngest police commissioner, Quick and he had devised The Whisperer to end all interference by meddling politicians.

Quick did not want to tell Tiny all about that; so he merely turned, squeezed her hand and told her to stay inside the apartment. Tiny pouted for a moment. Then she went back to the big divan. Beside her there, sat large-eyed, wan Karen Lascalles. The little girl seemed awed and overwhelmed by all that was going on around her.

Quick Trigger stamped out and took the elevator down to the street level far below. The old man paused, just before he went out into the

street. He adjusted a hidden lever beside the shaft of the elevator. That turned on a nozzle that would automatically spray any intruder with a gas that would render him unconscious for hours. Quick grunted in approval and strode out into the night.

From on top of the elevator cage, a small, hard face appeared. A man had been crouching there; he had seen Quick manipulate the secret lever that controlled the defense gas. With a rasping laugh, the intruder clambered down and restored the lever to its original position. Then he slunk to the door and watched old Quick go off in a taxi. The taxi rounded the corner onto West Street.

Instantly, the furtive one began wigwagging with his arms.

Tiny Traeger heard the elevator ascending. It was perhaps unfortunate that she knew old Quick was sometimes a trifle absent-minded. Not infrequently would he realize he had forgotten to speak to Tiny about some trifle and would come back up the elevator to do so. Tiny uncurled herself from the big divan when she heard the elevator. She spoke softly to Karen Lascalles, told her to be calm; that everything was as it should be.

In the short space of time since she had taken charge of the twelve-year-old girl, Tiny had found her a companionable little person. As one young woman to another in a time of need, Tiny had tried to comfort her and assure her that whatever happened, her mother would be all right. Tiny was not so sure herself. She had heard old Quick say that Sofia Lascalles had been found standing above a dead man, murder knife in her hand.

It was with her mind filled with plans to comfort the sad-eyed girl on the divan that Tiny walked quickly to the door to see what she could do for her father. She knew old Quick was in a hurry and would want whatever he had forgotten given to him swiftly.

Then the door swung open. Swarthy men rushed into the room. Tiny whirled quickly, dashed to the cabinet that held half a dozen small-caliber guns with which she was familiar. The diminutive Tiny was a crack shot. Had she reached that cabinet there would have been more than one casualty among the invaders.

But Tiny did not reach the cabinet!

The spy, who had been perched atop the elevator cage when Quick Trigger went out, tackled her in football style. Two other swarthy invaders rushed over; they pinioned the girl's hands behind her.

Tiny spoke quickly to twelve-year-old Karen Lascalles. The girl who had been a virtual prisoner of Tiny Traeger showed instantly the extent to which she trusted her erstwhile captor. She rushed to the gun cabinet and whipped out two .32 automatics; she whirled upon the invaders.

The hood who held Tiny dropped her, whipped up a heavy automatic. A large thug who wore a mask roared a warning, rushed over to the gunman and slapped the gun from his hand. Almost in the same motion, he struck the two pistols from the hands of Karen Lascalles. It seemed that these prisoners, for some reason or other, were worth more to this gang alive than dead.

The masked leader growled orders in a harsh voice. The invaders moved with almost military precision. They marched out with their prisoners and stood in the ele-

vator. When the cage reached the street level, the big masked leader growled orders to the henchman who had observed Quick Trigger's departure. The hood moved swiftly to the lever that controlled the defensive-gas system devised by Quick Trigger and Wildcat. Then he moved away, grinning.

When Quick and Wildcat returned and found Tiny and Karen Lascalles gone, but the gas lever still in place, they would be baffled by the manner in which the kidnaping had been carried out.

The hoods leered at Tiny, shoved her ahead. They did not hail a cab or go off in an automobile. The two girls were thrust roughly across West Street to an abandoned steamer pier. Since the war, many piers and docks had been unused. In a tiny pocket near the outer end of an abandoned wharf, a powerful speedboat lay. Twin motors under her engine housing promised fifty miles an hour or more if need me. No boat owned by the New York Police Department could even dream of overhauling that fast craft of the kidnapers.

A low, rumbling laugh came from the masked leader as he lowered himself into the steering cockpit. One of his aids dropped quickly onto the narrow catwalk between the two brutes of motors. In an instant they set up a roar that sounded like half a dozen machine guns in action.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WHISPERER TRAPPED.

Slug Minor would have gotten away from headquarters without difficulty but for one slight circumstance. The circumstance was long-nosed, small-eyed Henry Bolton.

Slug picked his men and headed down the main corridor of headquarters. He had an emergency truck waiting outside. He had described his mission to the desk lieutenant as a routine gas explosion on the water front.

Slug almost got away with it.

But it just happened that among the thugs assaulting the citadel of The Whisperer, there was a ratty stool pigeon who worked for Henry. He got away from the gang long enough to phone Henry and tell him where The Whisperer was cornered.

Bolton encountered Slug in the corridor and asked him the address of his gas explosion. The address Henry had corresponded. His fish-like mouth looked for a moment as if it were going to blow soap bubbles. Then Henry found words.

"I'll take charge. This is the time we nab The Whisperer."

That was a stock phrase with Henry. But this time he was more nearly right than he realized. A voice at Bolton's elbow brought a gasp of disgust from Slug Minor.

"Gee!" the voice said. "This'll be lots of fun, huh? I know, now, that that man kidnaped me. I want to help catch him."

Joe Mindler's voice was full of righteous indignation. Henry had been telling him what a horrible creature of the underworld The Whisperer really was. Joe was giving a good imitation of a small boy being allowed to follow the fire engines. He was either straight from the haymow, or he was an actor well versed in his profession.

Slug Minor looked at the tight-trousered, flat-hatted lad from New Jersey. Slug picked up his dictionary, looked at it and threw it in a corner.

"If that agricultural aborigine goes, I stay," he said disgustedly. "Haven't I got enough troubles with-

out raising sunflowers on a shooting job?"

Bolton whined nasally. He wasn't too crazy about the gangling bumpkin. But Joe Mindler had two reasons for rating popularity with Henry Bolton: One, Joe looked like a sure-fire heir to a fortune—if they could find the fortune. And, two, Joe was the personal protégé of Splendid Sheester who, if somewhat unsavory, was a shyster of political importance.

"You'll go where you're told, Slug," Bolton told Wildcat's chauffeur importantly. "It seems that Wildcat is absent every time there's a difficult job to do. He's a regular country-club commissioner."

Slug Minor took a hitch in his pants.

"I'll go along," he growled, "if it's only to get an opportunity to set you on your pants."

It was not particularly in a spirit of harmony that the emergency truck set out from headquarters to capture The Whisperer. It was in a less harmonious mood that they continued after picking up old Quick Trigger half a block from the old tenement.

Quick beamed when he saw Slug Minor at the wheel of the truck. He grimaced slightly when he saw Joe Mindler. He cursed out loud when he saw Henry Bolton sitting smugly beside the driver.

"Hell!" Quick muttered. "There'll be only one thing Henry wants to do. That'll be to grab The Whisperer."

Inside the wreck of a building, The Whisperer was still holding the mobsters at bay. The wraithlike fighter had slammed lead into a light socket and blown a main fuse. He was in the chamber below the main room of his apartment.

Flashlights flicked on and were promptly shot into bits. The Whisperer had several spare ammunition clips. The crooks under Angel Nigren were closing in slowly, taking care to cover themselves as they crowded in. None of them knew that reinforcements were on the way —reinforcements that would be as distasteful to The Whisperer as they would be to the mobbies, themselves.

It was in a state of seige, broken only by scattered shots and the gradual closing in of the gunmen that the sirens of the emergency truck first burst upon their ears. The Whisperer was crouched in the dark. The metal can, containing the gelatin sheets, was in the pocket of his black coat.

At first, the killers did not realize that the cops were headed for the abandoned tenement. Then the emergency truck screamed to a brake-burning halt. Cops poured out of it and Angel Nigren's gang found itself between two fires.

The Whisperer kept pumping shots with his supersilenced guns. Up the stairs raced two burly cops. It was not unnatural that Quick Trigger and Slug Minor should lead any assault into the face of guns. But Quick Trigger was battling to save the life and career of Wildcat Gorden.

Slug did not know about that. But he knew that old Quick was upset about something. And he knew that the grizzled veteran had cautioned him not to shoot to kill with The Whisperer.

"Take him alive," old Quick advised, "I want to talk to him."

Slug did not know. And he didn't ask any questions. Of course, he did know that old Quick was the closest friend of Wildcat Godon. And he may have caught just the slightest

tremor in the old man's voice when he urged Slug to take the mystery man of crime and to take him alive.

Slug and Quick came up those stairs bellowing a war cry that could be heard for a block. Those tremendous six-shooters of Quick Trigger boomed like twin coast-defense guns at target practice. Gunmen screamed and fell!

There was one killer who used his head. Angel Nigren jumped silently down into the pit in which The Whisperer crouched. Angel took advantage of the roar of guns and the flash of powder. He took one quick chance, got his hands on the metal container containing the gelatin sheets that The Whisperer had brought with him.

Angel gave the container a twist, hissed a quick word to a henchman above. The Whisperer was well occupied with a combination of police and gunmen pouring lead down into the pit. In one quick instant, the Angel was lifted out of the pit and onto the floor above. In the same split second floodlights, hauled up from the emergency truck, flashed on, illuminating the whole place with a ghastly brilliance.

The dark form of The Whisperer was clearly outlined, trapped in the deep square pit. Quick leaned over, rumbled low words of caution. The little foe of crime shrugged, threw up his hands. It was either that or his best friend would be forced to shoot him. Those had been Wildcat's orders to old Quick. The old man undoubtedly would not have done it; but there were many other cops there who would have.

Angel Nigren scampered off in the confusion that followed. The cops were mainly interested in The Whisperer. Also, they did not know about the metal container that held the will of Dr. Stepan Howell.

But Joe Mindler, the country bumpkin, knew about the container. The Whisperer had told him that something pretty important was in there. And even a country bumpkin who suddenly finds himself the potential heir to a potential estate is liable to get somewhat excited about it.

Joe saw Angel Nigren come up with the container, saw him race rabbitlike toward the stairs with it. Joe had once seen a flying tackle made in a newsreel. He tried it, now. Angel Nigren had apparently also seen flying tackles made.

The Angel stiff-armed Joe Mindler and kept right on going with the metal container. His henchmen tore along at his heels.

Joe Mindler struggled to his feet. He looked once behind him. Then he moved out onto the street and walked rapidly along under the structure of the express highway.

Back in the tenement, Henry Bolton was dancing up and down in glee. Below him, under the glare of the portable floods, Slug Minor and half a dozen cops were manacling The Whisperer.

The slanted green eyes of the mystery figure of the underworld glared balefully at Bolton. The Whisperer submitted to arrest without useless struggle that would have injured honest, hard-working cops. The odds against him were far too great.

What concerned the fighter most was that Angel Nigren had gotten away; that the trap had yielded nothing that would help solve the mystery of Howell Acres. The Whisperer was hauled up to the floor of the main apartment. Bolton's chest was beginning to swell like a balloon.

Quick Trigger deflated that somewhat.

"Let's take him right to Wildcat's office," Quick suggested. "Wildcat will want to question this bird."

Henry Bolton's face fell. The one thing he did not want was to have Wildcat Gordon get in on any of the publicity attending the capture of The Whisperer. Henry thought for a moment. Then he clapped his hands together, twisted his lips into what a fish would probably have considered a smile.

"The Whisperer will go to the River Precinct," Henry snapped. "You, Quick Trigger, will report to Inspector Banner in the Bronx to bring a prisoner downtown."

Bolton turned to Slug Minor.

"You go to the St. George Station on Staten Island," Bolton ordered. "Captain Murphy, there, has a package for me."

Henry paused. Then he issued one more order.

"You are to tell no one," he said nasally, "that The Whisperer has been captured. Phone wires may be tapped and we can take no chances on an underworld jail delivery."

Henry Bolton then turned to the task in hand. He had effectively put Wildcat Gordon's two best friends on details that would keep them busy and out of his way. He had ordered that there be no conversation about the capture.

And the River Precinct was the perfect spot. Selected by Wildcat Gordon, River Precinct was a building that the city thought abandoned. Wildcat brought prisoners there who needed long questioning without interference from their attorneys. When the lawyers finally caught up with them, they would be in some other station.

Bolton squealed in glee as his burly cops shoved The Whisperer into the River Precinct bull pen. No one would know that he had the mystery man of the underworld until he brought the newspaper boys down to see him.

Bolton stayed until The Whisperer was transferred to a cell off the musty corridor of River Precinct jail. Henry had two prisoners here, now. There was no women's division. But around a turn in the corridor, there were three cells separated from the rest. In one of those, Henry had locked up Sofia Lascalles.

Henry chortled happily as he turned and strode out of the jail. His first stops would be the newspapers. Then he would try the city-hall press room. By the time Henry Bolton got back to River Precinct he would be a famous man. Wildcat would be in the discard.

The extent to which such a conclusion could be drawn would have flabbergasted Henry Bolton. Had someone suddenly informed him that Wildcat Gordon and The Whisperer were both locked up in that cell behind him, Henry would probably have fainted dead away.

Back in the dark, dingy cell, The Whisperer's jade-green eyes glittered weirdly in the gloom. The ghostly, hissing chuckle of the foe of crime filled the cell block with eerie sound.

A prisoner across the narrow corridor found that the whispering chuckle rasped his nerves like a coarse file.

"What's on y'ur mind, guy," he rasped. "Let us in on the joke."

The eerie voice of The Whisperer informed the prisoner that he had been surrounded by both gangsters and police. The police had gotten him without too much trouble.

The Whisperer paused to chuckle softly once more.

"The cops didn't get the will, though! The mobsters fooled them there. Angel Nigren got that metal container I found at Howell Acres!"

A startled gasp came from down the corridor. Then the husky contralto voice of Sofia Lascalles moaned into the gloom.

"Oh, the will!" she burst out. "They must not have it! They must not know what it says!"

The Whisperer chuckled softly. Why would the mother wish to suppress a will by which her child would fall heir to riches?

The nemesis of crime did not have the answer to that one. The tangle surrounding the will of Dr. Stepan Howell still eluded The Whisperer.

That Dr. Stepan had been murdered, The Whisperer was certain. He had some ideas on how it might have been accomplished. But the mad rush to find—or to destroy—the will of the anthropologist had interfered with the mere investigation of murder.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WHISPERER ESCAPES!

That will was being discussed even as The Whisperer, in his cell in River Precinct, tried to piece together this queer puzzle. Angel Nigren started the discussion by dialing a number on the phone in his water-front hide-out.

"I got it, chief," Angel grated when he got his party. "Shall I bring it to you?"

The voice on the other end became a frantic bleat of excitement.

"No, no! You might be stopped. I might be searched if I had it. Destroy it, you fool! Burn it right where you are. It must be gotten out of the way."

The man hung up. Angel Nigren turned from the phone. His falsely youthful face looked as innocent as ever. The Angel laughed gratingly and his pale, colorless eyes surveyed the metal container that The Whisperer had found.

Angel Nigren pulled off the top of the container and fished out the contents. He could find nothing on the three transparent sheets. But he had been told to expect that. Angel shrugged. It wasn't any of his concern, anyway. He was being paid well to destroy this evidence.

A gas plate rested on a rough table in the center of the room. Angel Nigren strode to that and touched a match to one of the two burners. In the blue flame of the gas plate, the gelatinous sheets curled up and dissolved in smoke.

The phone rang just as the Angel finished. He answered. It was the same person he had called before. The voice demanded to know if the will had been destroyed. The Angel assured him that his instructions had been carried out to the letter.

"O. K.," the voice grated over the phone. "Then here's a job for you. This one is just as important as the last one."

"Shoot!" Nigren rasped. "I'll get rollin' right away."

The crime-for-hire mob leader listened while his "client" sketched the details of what he was to do. The client told Nigren to go to a certain private garage near Howell Acres on Long Island and pick up certain equipment. The equipment was to be transported in a moving van to another address in downtown Manhattan.

Nigren grunted his understanding of the instructions. The man laughed as he hung up. It was a harsh, sneering laugh of triumph. There probably would not have been that note of triumph had either the client or Nigren known that The

Whisperer had tapped into the Angel's phone shortly after he had recognized Nigren on Dr. Howell's estate.

An automatic recording disk picked up all conversations carried on over Angel Nigren's wire. Those conversations were recorded for the ears of the foe of the underworld.

Had he known about that, Angel Nigren might have thought he had ample time to locate that recording device and destroy it. All the underworld knew of the plight of The Whisperer.

But the underworld was just as falsely sure as was Henry Bolton. The Whisperer was not idle in his murky cell in River Precinct. Old Quick Trigger had had a purpose in shocking Henry Bolton with the suggestion that The Whisperer be taken immediately to Wildcat Gordon.

Quick knew that the River Precinct was the only place Henry Bolton had available to hide The Whisperer until he could arrange the maximum of publicity. And The Whisperer had long foreseen such a possibility. Inside the leg of each cot in River Precinct was a key. A master key that The Whisperer carried unlocked the inner compartment of each leg.

The ghostlike figure chuckled softly as he let himself out of his cell and into the narrow corridor. A whispered conversation came from Sofia Lascalles' cell around the corner of the corridor. A dim form glided silently out of the cell. There was the grating of a key in a lock. A side door of the cell block opened. The figure drifted out into the night; a second figure followed.

Presently, the crisp, sulphurous tones of Wildcat Gordon barked from the street outside the entrance to River Precinct. The desk lieutenant snapped to attention. There was something in the tone of Wildcat's voice that boded ill for someone. The desk lieutenant hoped fervently that that one was not himself.

"What's going on around here?" Wildcat demanded. "What's this I hear about The Whisperer being locked up without my knowing anything about it?"

Wildcat pounded on the desk with his fist. His sharp blue eyes bored through the desk lieutenant. The desk man gulped. He knew that it was not a situation of his making. But still, he didn't relish the spot he was in.

The arrival of Henry Bolton helped him somewhat. Photographers and reporters followed Henry. The fish-mouthed deputy chortled happily. He was on the threshold of the greatest moment in his career.

"Why didn't you bring him to me, Bolton?" Wildcat demanded. "This is no place to leave an important prisoner. This old dump should have been torn down long ago."

Henry smirked and bowed his entourage into the cell block. Wildcat leaned back against the big desk and scratched his head thoughtfully. The explosion came almost immediately. Bolton catapulted out of the cell block like a long-nosed projectile. There was panic in his small, close-set eyes.

"He's gone!" Henry gasped. "He's gone and so is the Lascalles woman."

Wildcat turned to the newspaper boys and shrugged.

"Ought not to keep dangerous criminals in a mouse trap," he observed. "We got a good jail downtown. But I guess it wasn't private enough to suit Bolton."

Henry Bolton squirmed. He was

so unhappy he looked relieved when Quick Trigger stamped into the room. Old Quick's face was an ashy, panic-stricken gray. He drew one quick breath when he saw Wildcat Gordon outside of the cell block. That made him believe that something might be done. But Quick would have gotten The Whisperer out of that cell block anyway—if he had to tear down the building to do it.

"Tiny's been kidnaped!" Quick Trigger gulped. "Tiny and the little daughter of the Lascalles!"

CHAPTER IX.

ISLAND STRONGHOLD.

The news reporters forgot Henry Bolton. They ran for telephones. Flash bulbs ripped the dimness of the station house as the photographers snapped pictures of Quick Trigger and Wildcat.

The commissioner tore out of the station house. Quick panted along beside him.

"Sofia Lascalles!" Wildcat bit out. "She has to be the key in this thing. They've got her daughter as well as yours!"

Quick groaned.

"Yeah," he agreed. "But she's gone, too."

Wildcat was silent for a moment. Then he picked up the trail of Gregoire Lascalles' wife. Wildcat knew that her shoes had been impregnated with a white, chalklike substance in the River Precinct cell. The stuff was of a peculiar composition and would last for several hours.

The woman's footsteps led them toward the river front near Brooklyn Bridge. Both men were intent on the trail that might lead them to Tiny Traeger. There was a trace of dampness in Wildcat's eyes. No one but old Quick knew the tenderness he really felt for the dynamic Tiny.

Wildcat and Tiny often seemed to be quarreling. Actually, they were devoted to each other. But the square-jawed commissioner felt that his life of fighting crime was too dangerous for a woman to share. Tiny disagreed with him. But Wildcat was determined that such was the case.

Near a dilapidated section of the water front, Quick paused, squinted ahead of him. Dimly, he discerned a whitish figure in the gloom. Wildcat saw it, too.

Both men were so absorbed that they failed to notice another dark form on the water front! That one was not ahead of them, but behind.

Wildcat and Quick Trigger were being followed by a furtive man who darted in and out of dark corners, pausing in black doorways. The following shadow paused then. Apparently he, too, saw the whitish figure ahead of them.

He cut off to one side, then quickened his pace. He ran lightly and was soon abreast of Quick and Wildcat, but on another street. Wildcat was racing along then. He caught the whitish figure that had been ahead.

It was Sofia Lascalles.

Sofia knew that The Whisperer had freed her. She did not know that Wildcat was also the ghostlike foe of crime. She whirled around, alarm in her large dark eyes. Wildcat wasted no time in preliminaries.

"Some mob kidnaped Tiny Traeger and your daughter, Karen," Wildcat snapped. "I'm going to hold you until you tell me everything you know about this thing."

Sofia Lascalles at first seemed to be rational about it. She protested that she knew nothing of the kidnaping. Then her dark eyes clouded with fear.

"The will!" she gasped. "Maybe he—"

Sofia Lascalles whipped out of Wildcat's grasp. A low moan escaped her lips and she began to run. Her move was so sudden, so unexpected, that it caught Wildcat momentarily by surprise. Sofia rounded the corner of an ancient wooden shack. Wildcat and Quick Trigger pounded after her.

Neither expected the figures that catapulted against them as they turned the corner. Quick and Wildcat were side by side. The man plunged into them, knocked both to the ground. Then the assailant took to his heels and raced after Sofia Lascalles.

Wildcat and Quick Trigger scrambled to their feet, tore after the two fugitives. The man who had plunged into them overhauled Sofia Lascalles just as she got to a rotted wooden dock. He seized her roughly with his hands, and, at first, Sofia seemed about to give him a fight. Then she saw Wildcat and Quick Trigger rushing down upon them. She nodded in quick assent. Both of them plunged off that wooden dock into the chill water of the East River!

Splashing sounds came from beneath the dock. The obvious thing to do was to follow the fleeing pair by the same route they had taken. Wildcat and Quick plunged into the darkness of the water after them.

That proved to be an error. The sudden racketing of a speedboat roared into their ears. The sharp prow of the boat that had been hidden beneath the dock shot past them and headed out into the river.

Wildcat Gordon didn't have time to whip out his gun, but he did have his flashlight in one hand. The pale beam caught Sofia Lascalles and her companion in the glare.

The man was Joe Mindler, the country bumpkin who seemed to have grown extremely active in this case!

Quick had his big guns out then. They boomed into the night. But the distance was too great. And Quick was hanging by one hand from a stringpiece of the wharf, scarcely a good bracing for marksmanship.

As the speedboat disappeared beyond the limit of the flashlight beam they saw Sofia Lascalles suddenly turn on her partner. The two struggled in the stern of the boat. Sofia seemed trying to shove Mindler into the river.

Then the boat was gone, swallowed by the blackness of the night.

Wildcat and Quick climbed back onto the dock. Quick muttered under his breath.

"She's a hellcat! And I can't figure out that other guy at all."

Wildcat was silent for a moment. Then he spoke, half to himself.

"At first, she wasn't worried about the kidnap job," he mused. "Then, when she thought of the stolen will, she was panic-stricken."

Quick squinted at him.

"Where does that get us?" he demanded.

"Her first guess was that her husband kidnaped the two girls," Wildcat suggested. "That didn't worry her. Her second guess was that it was someone else."

Quick scratched his head. It didn't make any sense to him.

"She's worried about the will. So are Sheester and Joe Mindler. They all seem conspiring to keep the will away from one twelve-year-old girl," Quick grunted. "And, yet, whoever has hidden the wealth that Howell left controls it anyway. All this doesn't get anyone anywhere."

Quick's voice was querulous. He

knew they'd have to figure out the angles on this thing to get a starting point in their search for Tiny Traeger. He looked hopefully at Wildcat.

"I planted dictaphones in Mindler's hotel room and in Angel Nigren's hide-out," Wildcat snapped. "There may be a lead in my rooms across from police headquarters."

Just before they left, Wildcat paused to look out over the darkness of the river; as if he thought he still might catch a glimpse of the fleeing speedboat.

Wildcat could not have known it, but Sofia Lascalles and Joe Mindler were not the only figures in the mystery who were out on that broad river.

The twin-motored racer that carried Tiny Traeger and Karen had roared around the tip of Manhattan from the Hudson. She was now knifing through the black water above Williamsburg Bridge and swinging toward Long Island Sound.

Tiny and Karen Lascalles were both bound and gagged. They lay on the broad leather seat of the foreward cockpit of the racer. The man at the wheel was muffled in loose clothing that hid his identity. He wore a mask that covered his entire face. The rest of the mob was nondescript.

The leader muttered threats in a hollow voice. Two of his henchmen, standing at his side, glanced nervously at him.

"I'll kill all of them!" the driver muttered. "They're not going to stop me, now. Nothing can stop me!"

Savagely, he swung the wheel of the powerful racer. She roared through Hell Gate, tossed spray at Riker's Island. The sea grew choppier as the big motors pounded the hull past Flushing Bay and bore down on the point called Throgs Neck. There, the masked driver lined his craft for the Westchester shore.

He passed half a dozen of the tiny islands that dot the water off the east shore of Long Island Sound in that area. One of them he did not pass. The throttle was cut and the powerful motors dropped to idling speed. The great plumes of spray ceased spreading from the racer's prow. A powerful searchlight winked on from her foredeck, picked out the rough outline of the tiny island.

At first, rocks seemed scattered carelessly about the little island. Then they took on a careful pattern. Some of the rocks were cast of concrete and small stones. There were gun placements in some of them. Notches had been cut to cradle machine guns.

The little island proved to be a veritable fortress. The speedboat drifted into a tiny dock. The driver reversed her powerful motors to check her forward motion. Her bow gently nudged the dock, and men leaped out to make her fast. The burly leader barked orders; his henchmen seized the two girls and hustled them up a narrow path to a mound that looked like a huge, jagged rock in the center of the island.

The jagged rock proved to be a carefully laid-out building, most of which was below ground. A door opened and Tiny and Karen were shoved into a brightly lighted room. Tiny gasped behind her gag. The place was furnished luxuriously.

There was a baby-grand piano in one corner. Comfortable divans were against the walls. The lighting was all indirect, restful to the eyes. Tiny struggled to her feet. Her hands were still tied, but her ankles

had been freed to permit her to walk from the speedboat.

On the baby-grand piano there were a dozen or so personal photographs. Tiny's blue eyes widened as she looked from one to the other. There were photographs of Dr. Stepan Howell, Kent Howell, Joe Mindler and of the three Lascalles. Also there was a picture of a wistfully beautiful woman; the picture had been taken some ten or eleven years before.

Tiny, of course, did not know it, but this was another print of the photograph that had so baffled The Whisperer in the laboratory-office of Dr. Stepan Howell.

The jangling of a telephone interrupted Tiny Traeger's thoughts. The burly driver of the speedboat leaped to the instrument. He worked the mouthpiece up under his mask, spoke in husky muffled tones. Tiny could only hear one end of the conversation, but she memorized that to tell Wildcat or Quick Trigger—if she should ever see either of them again. The masked one's first words were a question, rasped in a tone of incredulity.

"The will is stolen? Damn!"

Through the eye slits in the mask, Tiny Traeger could see a sudden expression of fear. That one overwhelming emotion, fear, stepped out again in connection with the will of Dr. Stepan Howell.

"D-did he see it? D-does he know—"

The masked man's voice was hushed. A decision of tremendous importance seemed to hang on the answer he got over that phone. The metallic rasping from the receiver did not seem to reassure him. He set the phone down with a gutteral curse.

"I'll kill him!" he rumbled. "I'll strangle him with my bare hands if he interferes again in this."

RICHARD TRAEGER

● Retired Deputy Traeger, known as old Quick Trigger, is Wildcat Gordon's most trusted friend. He, alone, knows the secret of The Whisperer, for it was old Quick who aided Wildcat in devising the ghostlike figure of the underworld who is the foe of crime.

The burly leader strode across the room. Behind his back, one of his henchmen grinned evilly. He rubbed his hands together as if he had just accomplished something pretty smart—or, as if he were about to.

The furtive thug crept softly out of the luxurious room, past the man

stationed at the door. Outside, he squinted carefully at the lights of Westchester, twinkling at him from the shore. With a sly grin, he shucked off his coat and slid quietly into the chilly waters of Long Island Sound.

In another moment he was pulling toward the shore with the long, even strokes of an accomplished swimmer.

Back down the murky waters of the East River, Sofia Lascalles did not tolerate her unwelcome passenger. Joe Mindler struggled with her briefly. Then Sofia shrugged, relaxed. Joe thought he had won the struggle.

He grinned. The grin became a silly, vacant gape as he sank slowly to the floorboards of the cockpit. Joe Mindler went to sleep right where he was.

Sofia Lascalles' face was grim with some strange determination. She put down the end wrench with which she had knocked out Joe Mindler. Then she swung the boat in toward the Manhattan shore. The speedboat was much smaller than the one in which the two kidnaped girls had been taken to the island stronghold.

Sofia Lascalles eased the boat into a deserted coal dock several blocks upriver from the rotted dock where they had eluded Wildcat Gordon and Quick Trigger. She tied it to a stringpiece and removed the distributor head from the motor. This she hid under a coal pile on the dock.

Joe Mindler would encounter difficulties if he tried to move *that* boat.

Sofia Lascalles looked back at the slumped figure in the boat; then she returned and felt the prone man's wrist. His pulse was strong and steady. Joe Mindler would soon wake up and wonder where he was.

Sofia Lascalles drew himself up to her full regal height. Her dark eyes burned with a strange luminosity. Her jaw was set, determined. Water still dripped from her dress.

The man in the cigar store into which she strode noticed that. He opened his mouth to speak about it, but the burning stare of the woman's eyes made him change his mind.

Sofia Lascalles was in the phone booth four or five minutes. When she emerged, her eyes burned more fiercely than before. As she stepped out into the dark street, one slim hand slipped into the neck of her dress.

When that hand emerged, it held the gleaming handle of a long-bladed knife!

CHAPTER X.

MURDERER'S METHOD.

There were few words spoken between Wildcat Gordon and Quick Trigger on the walk back to headquarters. Both of them were too worried about the train of events to engaged in conversation. At Centre Street, the two friends parted.

Quick went into headquarters to see if there were any news there that could help them. Wildcat started on the devious route that led to the hide-out of The Whisperer, across from headquarters. Quick Trigger was to join him as soon as he had ascertained whether there was any official information at hand.

Wildcat's pulse quickened when he saw that there was a recording on the machine he had cut into Angel Negrin's phone. The young commissioner was just about to turn it on when Quick burst into the room.

The old man's eyes glowed strangely. He waved a sheet of paper at Wildcat, then handed it to him. The missive was short, type-

written and unsigned. It was addressed to Quick Trigger.

"Your daughter is for the moment safe. If events remain in proper hands, she will remain so. Otherwise I cannot guarantee it."

Quick Trigger groaned.

"In other words, if we lay off, she will be all right. If we don't, she won't be."

Wildcat shook his head.

"If the criminals who are trying to locate Howell's hidden wealth have her, they don't want events to remain as they are," he pointed out. "It is not as simple as that." He paused. Then: "At least, it seems to mean that we have a little time."

Quick grunted that he hoped so. He said that there wasn't any other news at headquarters. Investigation had failed to pick up any trail of Tiny and Karen Lascalles. No one had seen the kidnapers at all. They had apparently vanished into thin air.

Wildcat turned to the recording disk, started the playback. The first conversation between Angel Nigren and his client rasped from the loudspeaker. The wire tapped was Nigren's. There was no indication as to whom the client might be.

The man's voice was either disguised, or neither Quick Trigger or Wildcat had heard it before. They heard him direct the immediate burning of the contents of the metal container. Then there was a moment of silence before the second call.

Wildcat whipped out a pencil to take notes on that one. His eyes hardened at the description of the equipment the boss instructed Angel Nigren to remove from the garage.

Gordon stopped the playback to check the automatically stamped time of the message. Then he looked at his own watch.

"They've left Long Island before this," he snapped. "Probably almost back by now."

Wildcat moved swiftly through the room, giving Quick Trigger instructions.

"We'll intercept the Angel," he said. "And we're going to get a lot of answers from that pretty-faced killer."

Wildcat's voice grated with a fierce determination. Quick Trigger stamped impatiently.

"How about Tiny?" he grumbled.

"Angel's boss will help us find her. He's a kingpin in this business. And he'll talk."

Wildcat began drawing black clothing over his pin-striped suit. He rubbed black powder into his blond hair and took a pair of green contact lenses from a tiny drawer in a desk.

"Angel will talk," Wildcat said grimly. "Angel will plead with The Whisperer for a chance to tell what he knows."

Wildcat Gordon swiftly became the black-clad foe of crime who knew no rules or regulations. The Whisperer would wring from Angel Nigren everything he knew about the mystery of Howell Acres and of the whereabouts of Tiny Traeger and Karen Lascalles.

A whispering challenge of determination came from the lips of the superfighter as he slipped quietly out of the door. In Quick Trigger's eyes there glimmered a faint hope that he would soon be on the trail that would lead to recovery of his daughter.

"I'll get Slug Minor and some of the regulars and follow up," Quick rumbled. "We won't mess in unless there is shooting or unless you call me."

Quick Trigger picked up an odd-looking instrument from The Whis-

perer's equipment desk. It looked like a contrivance to aid a person who was hard of hearing. Actually, it was a tiny short-wave receiver. If The Whisperer were trapped on this job, he wanted to be able to summon help.

The Whisperer drifted out into the street and padded swiftly to his inconspicuous black coupé. He slid in behind the wheel and the car shot ahead.

The Whisperer tooled the coupé downtown toward Chambers Street. There, among the small retail stores, wholesale warehouse and vacant lofts, was the address to which Angel Nigren had been instructed to deliver the equipment he picked up on Long Island.

Chambers Street was dark and deserted as The Whisperer drove through. The address Wildcat had jotted down proved to be a vacant loft with a "For Rent" sign in the blank window. The Whisperer parked the coupé a block away and moved silently back to the loft building on foot.

No light shone in the building. A ghostly whisper issued from the lips of the foe of crime as he carefully inspected the big double doors through which a truck could pass. Then he looked at the fire escape.

The Whisperer decided that Angel Nigren could best be met within the structure that he considered safe. The boss mobster would be most vigilant on the streets outside of the appointed rendezvous. With a soft chuckle, the half-visible figure leaped to the lowest rung of the fire escape. Swiftly, he climbed to the roof of the old loft building.

In the center of the roof he found a skylight. A sharp tool opened that. The Whisperer dropped lightly through it and landed on the top floor of the building. His pencil flash flicked on.

Dust lay thick on the floor, proving that this part of the building had not recently been occupied. The Whisperer hissed in satisfaction, padded softly from the room and down the stairs.

The lower floors of the building were not so laden with the dust of disuse. Nor were they empty. An eerie chuckle of surprise burst from the stocky investigator. A strange collection of equipment was revealed in the pale beam of his flash.

There were roulette tables, pin-ball machines, slot machines and other gambling devices. There was a small, compact press with a set of copper counterfeit engravings. There were guns and knives of various types and sizes. In one corner, The Whisperer found a pile of counterfeit industrial stocks and bonds.

The Whisperer had stumbled on a veritable storehouse of equipment used by crooks. Either Angel Nigren or his client was a master in crime. The Whisperer wondered if Angel was graduating from the status of a mere hireling of the underworld. The temptation to become a big shot on his own may well have brought him into possession of all this equipment.

So engrossed was the ghostlike man that he failed to hear soft footsteps that padded up behind him. The first indication that he was not alone came in a rush of fast-moving bodies. The Whisperer whirled to meet a massed onslaught of gunmen.

Most of these men he had met before. He recognized some of them as killers who had aided in the trap set in his apartment off the Express Highway uptown.

With a whispering challenge, the

half-visible battler charged into his foes. Compact fists whipped up, found bone and gristle. The Whisperer fought his way to the stairs. He went down, instead of up. He cleared an entire flight of stairs with a single leap, landed on his feet.

In one quick motion, The Whisperer whirled, whipped out his supersilenced automatics. Clean blue flame lanced the darkness; lead ripped through the flesh of Angel Nigren's henchmen.

But assistance came to the gangsters unexpectedly. The big double doors of the garage swung open and a truck roared into the place. The doors swung closed again automatically. Angel Nigren leaped from the cab of the truck, hurling lead from flat, black automatics.

The Whisperer was caught between two blazing fires. A helper crawled from the truck and added twin guns to Nigren's blasting. The Whisperer crouched into a corner to conserve his shots. It had all happened so rapidly that he did not believe Quick Trigger would have gotten to the scene with reinforcements.

The stocky man's jade-green eyes glittered as he squeezed the triggers in his silenced weapons. Each hiss and stab of blue flame carved a hole in a mobster. As he fired, the dim battler weaved, dodging the fire of the killers. If he could sidestep lead long enough, help was on the way.

But The Whisperer did not sidestep one slug that blasted from Angel Nigren's guns. The leaden pellet creased his skull, sent his senses reeling. The stocky man folded up like a punctured bag of water. One hand went out instinctively to check his fall. The other snaked at one coat pocket.

There was a whisper of defiance; then the foe of crime relaxed, unconscious. Angel Nigren stepped quickly forward. He examined the pocket that The Whisperer had been trying to get one hand into. The device there was built something like an old-fashioned spark coil. Angel Nigren immediately sensed what it was.

"A short-wave transmitter," he grated. "The guy tried to get to it, but he didn't make it."

Nigren whirled to his henchmen. "O. K., unload the truck," he snarled. "Then stand by. The boss thinks we'll have to move fast tonight. Things are gettin' close to a windup."

Four thugs walked quickly to the tailboard of the truck. The apparatus they hauled from the body was innocent enough in appearance. It was a tank-and-compressor combination used for oxygen or compressed air. They hauled it to a corner and put it with a pile of rusted junk.

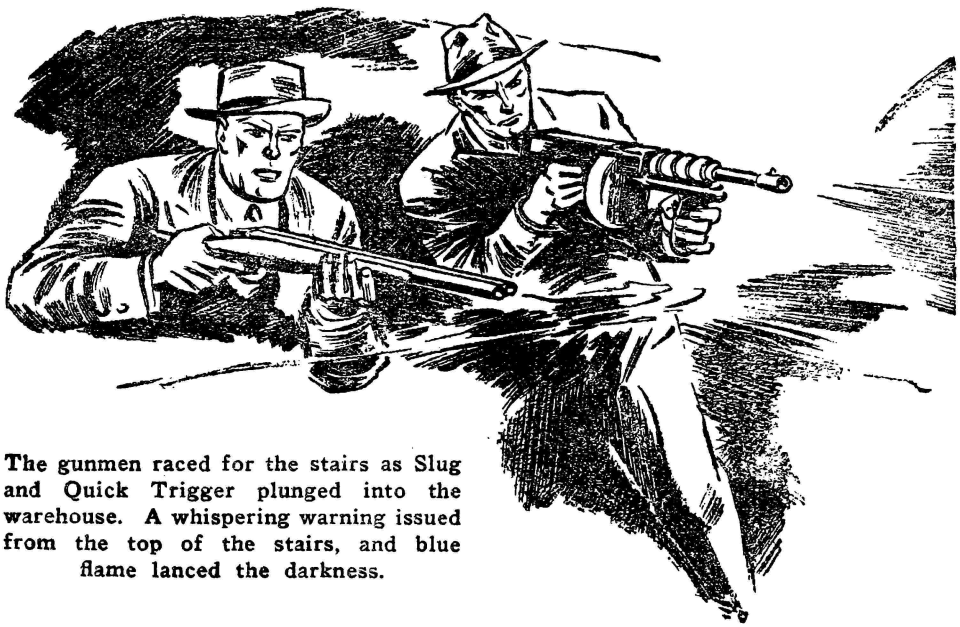
"O. K.!" Nigren said. "Now, we'll—"

Angel was interrupted by the stuttering chatter of a machine gun! Splinters flew from the wooden doors through which the truck had come. Steel-jacketed slugs cut a pattern in the wooden door.

The Whisperer's hand had been faster than Angel Nigren had thought. It *had* closed the key on the tiny transmitter. And the aid-to-hearing device worn by old Quick Trigger had picked it up.

The mobsters forgot The Whisperer. They crouched in the gloom of the warehouse and poured lead at the police.

Angel Nigren and the majority of his mob were caught on the side of the building away from the stairs. The arsenal of the gang was on the second floor. There were Tommy-guns there, riot guns and small



The gunmen raced for the stairs as Slug and Quick Trigger plunged into the warehouse. A whispering warning issued from the top of the stairs, and blue flame lanced the darkness.

bombs. Angel barked orders. The men nearest the stairs made a dash for it.

None of them noticed that the prone form of The Whisperer was no longer in the room.

They raced up the stairs to get the weapons that would spell murder for the cops who were now breaking down the doors. But they didn't reach the second floor. A whispering warning issued from the blackness. Blue flame again lanced the darkness. The ascending mobsters faltered and fell back with blood gushing from mortal wounds. The hissing challenge came again. Then there was a faint movement in the gloom.

The Whisperer was gone! The ghostlike battler vanished just as Quick Trigger and Slug Minor battered down the doors and plunged into the warehouse. Quick carried a Tommy-gun. Slug had a short-barreled riot gun that would tear a man in half at thirty feet.

Angel Nigren saw those guns. He also thought he was staring death in the face. He did not know that Wildcat had specifically ordered that he be taken alive. With a scream of terror, the Angel raced across the floor in a mad dash for the stairs. Part of Angel Nigren's gang was still behind him. The mobbies were still hurling lead at Quick Trigger and the cops who were pouring lead into the dark building.

It was probably entirely an accident that Angel Nigren got in the way of one of those bullets!

A soft-nosed slug smashed against the back of Nigren's skull, taking most of his face away as it went through.

The mobsters quit when they saw their leader fall. They scrambled over each other getting out of the building. Some of them got away. Others were killed trying to fight their way to freedom. The building was quiet when Wildcat Gordon strode into the front entrance. The

acrid stench of burned cordite filled the air.

"Where's Nigren?" Wildcat snapped. "I want to talk to him."

Quick Trigger pointed silently at the slumped body on the floor. It needed no examination to determine that Angel Nigren was dead.

"He won't do any talking," Quick Trigger groaned. "It looks as if we did all this for nothing."

Wildcat Gordon's eyes narrowed. A little pressure on Angel Nigren had been his main hope in tracing Tiny Traeger through the person who had hired the baby-faced killer. Now, that was gone!

Wildcat hesitated for a moment. Then he looked at the compressor contrivance in the pile of junk. He strode toward it.

"Not entirely for nothing," he snapped. He examined the pressure tank slowly.

"This is the one that was in Dr. Howell's room when he died," Wildcat said. "I scratched the paint with my ring, so I could identify it later. There's probably another one there, now, that looks just like this."

Quick Trigger grumbled that he didn't see what difference it made. Wildcat said nothing. He seized the extension cord from the com-

pressor and plugged it into a wall socket. The electric motor chugged over and broke into a steady whine. Wildcat stepped quickly to the machine; he put his hand over the outlet through which oxygen was supposed to be forced into the room.

Wildcat's voice was harsh, sharp.

"This is the thing that killed Dr. Stepan Howell," he snapped. "This is the murder machine!"

Quick Trigger's mouth dropped open. Slug Minor craned his neck, stuck out his bullet of a head.

"It's not conceivable," he growled. "The thing's an ordinary oxygen compressor."

"Exactly," Wildcat snapped. "A compressor to be used in a sealed oxygen room such as Dr. Howell had, rather than for an oxygen tent."

Quick scratched his head. He didn't say anything. He knew there was more on the way. Slug looked pleased, as if his conclusion had been the right one. Wildcat's next words changed his expression.

"Only this one is run in reverse," Wildcat rapped. "This machine is hooked up so that it can remove all of the air from a sealed room and compress it in that tank!"

Quick Trigger gasped.

"Then . . . then Dr. Howell *did* die of suffocation, as the medical examiner reported."

"Not suffocation caused by failure of the heart," Wildcat said. "But suffocation caused by this machine which his already weakened heart could not withstand—a murder method that some smart brain considered foolproof!"

Wildcat swiftly reconstructed the death of Dr. Stepan Howell.

"When Kent Howell went back to the room and opened the door, air rushed in and replaced the partial vacuum," Wildcat said. "Then, after we had been in there, it was necessary to replace the death machine with an ordinary oxygen compressor. Remember, neither Kent nor the Lascalles went with us to the bank."

"Kent would have noticed a sudden inrush of air when he opened that door," Quick pointed out.

Wildcat Gordon quickly agreed. It seemed obvious that Kent Howell either was the actual murderer of his brother, or he had guilty knowledge of the plan. Then, someone had murdered Kent probably to shut his mouth.

But who? And why carry him along in the plot that far if it was the intent to murder him? Wildcat could not answer those questions. Quick reminded him that the murder knife had been found in the hand of Sofia Lascalles.

"And, now," Quick added bitterly, "we don't know where either Sofia or her husband is."

Wildcat moved to a phone.

"There is one person who seems to have more knowledge of Sofia Lascalles than we suspected," Wildcat said. "I'll try to get him."

Wildcat phoned the hotel where Joe Mindler, the country nephew of Dr. Stepan Howell, had said he was stopping. The girl at the information desk informed Wildcat that Joseph Mindler was not in his room. He had, however, left a phone number where he could be reached. She gave Wildcat the number.

Wildcat recognized it as the number of Splendid Sheester's office!

"Let's go," he rapped. "Both of those birds will have to do some talking."

CHAPTER XI.

SHEESTER AT BAY.

For once in his misspent life, Splendid Sheester would have been delighted to see Wildcat Gordon.

Sheester would have been glad to see almost anyone.

Splendid had fought a lot of battles in his unpleasant existence. He had been shot at, struck with blackjacks, tossed into rivers. He frequently spoke of those incidents in his past with a measure of contempt.

Right now, Sheester's round head glistened with the cold sweat of panic. The oily lawyer's lipless mouth hung open. Strange croaking sounds issued from his throat. Sheester backed cautiously toward the window. The three-floor drop probably would kill him. But that did not seem to concern him.

Long knife in her hand, dark eyes flashing in a hatred born of some strange desperation, Sofia Lascalles crouched scarcely inches away from Splendid Sheester.

Sofia Lascalles' face was starkly white. Two feverish spots of crimson showed on her cheekbones. Her breast heaved with deep emotion. Slowly, Sofia narrowed the distance between that sharp knife and the bulging-headed attorney.

Words dripped from her tight-pressed lips like tiny bullets of menace.

"I want that will, Sheester," she snapped. "I want the will that is written on the sheets of gelatin."

Splendid Sheester squirmed. His eyes seemed about to pop from his head.

"I . . . I haven't got it," he stammered. "I . . . I never had it at all."

"You're lying!" Sofia's husky voice ripped out. "Give me that will or I'll kill you."

Sheester's mouth opened and closed. He seemed to be desperately clutching to anything that might save him. The knife rose slowly, poised for a downward slash. Splendid Sheester screamed.

"I tell you I haven't got it!" he shouted. "Maybe Joe Mindler has it. Maybe he had someone steal it. I . . . I tell you I don't know."

A possibility that the lawyer told the truth seemed to trouble Sofia Lascalles. A new hysteria seemed to sweep her. Her lips twitched with some emotion so terrifying that she could not control it.

"You'll never hurt my baby, Sheester," she said. "I'll slash you into a million pieces before you so much as scratch that child!"

An expression of surprise passed over Splendid Sheester's face. The man seemed too terrified to simulate surprise if he did not really feel it. His mouth worked strangely. His pale eyes seemed both horrified and baffled. He backed slowly. Obviously, he feared that any quick movement on his part would bring a downward slash of the knife that might well spell his end. Frantic words of protest burst from his mouth.

"I . . . I never—" he began. "I d-don't want to hurt your girl. Why should I want to hurt—"

Sheester tried vainly to assure Sofia that he had no reason to hurt Karen Lascalles.

"You lie!" Sofia snapped at him. "You won't lie any more—"

Down on the street below, a car tried to cut in front of Slug Minor who was driving the police sedan. The sedan's siren wailed suddenly in the night. That disconcerted Sofia Lascalles; she turned her head.

Sheester leaped at her, ripped the knife from her hand. The terror left the oily lawyer, now. He had the knife. Swiftly, he moved toward the woman!

Sheester's eyes glittered sharply. He would exact penalties for the last few moments of terror he had undergone. Penalties for that—and some-

thing else. A queer light glowed in his eyes.

"Now," he purred. "We will continue to talk of your little girl. You will tell me why I should want to kill her. Perhaps you might be right. Perhaps I shall—"

With a strangling sob, Sofia Lascalles wrenched away. Too late, she realized that Splendid Sheester did *not* know the contents of the will left by Dr. Stepan Howell!

Sheester plunged after the woman. But she raced through the door, speeded by the strength of desperation. Words floated back from her as she tore down the hallway toward an emergency stairway exit.

"You'll never know, Sheester," Sofia screamed. "I will die before you could force me to tell."

Sheester started to follow Sofia Lascalles. But it was apparent that the woman could run; she could probably outrun Splendid Sheester. Also, his telephone began to shrill. Sheester retraced his steps and answered the phone. The voice was a cracked falsetto.

"They're all on an island in the Sound. Both the gals are there. It's straight off Pelham Manor. Looks like it's just a pile of rocks. I'm at the City Island shack. I'll wait here for you."

Sheester grunted in approval. He started to ask more questions. But he heard Wildcat Gordon's voice bark out in the corridor. He hung up, hurriedly.

But as Splendid Sheester turned to greet his new visitors there was a crooked grin on his face. He rubbed his oily hands together.

"Splendid," he croaked. "Ah, this is really splendid."

Wildcat Gordon strode into Splendid Sheester's office. Quick Trigger and Slug Minor were close behind him. Sheester gave his hands a dry wash, bobbing his head in a mock bow to his visitors. He seemed vastly pleased with himself.

"Ah, the authorities are honoring me," he smirked. "What can I do for you?"

"Produce Joe Mindler," Wildcat snapped. "We want to talk to him."

Splendid Sheester pursed his mouth in surprise. He denied that he had any idea of the whereabouts of his country client.

"I want to find out how deeply he is mixed up in the murder of Stepan Howell," Wildcat said flatly. His hard blue eyes watched Sheester closely.

If the lawyer was concealing guilty knowledge, he was doing so with rare ability. Splendid did not show a flicker of an eye. His only reaction was to raise slightly the pale flesh located where he should have had an eyebrow.

"Murdered?" he inquired smoothly. "Was Dr. Howell murdered?"

Slug Minor uttered a low growl and started toward the lawyer. Slug didn't like Splendid Sheester, and he didn't see any particular reason for concealing that fact.

"Let me work the guy over a little, chief," he begged. "I'll ascertain whether he's dissembling veridicality."

Sheester cocked one eye at Slug.

"Remarkable vocabulary for a lower primate," he rasped. "But I am not dis—not hiding the truth in this case." Then Splendid took a different approach. His voice became a snarl of insolence. If Splendid was guilty of any crime, he felt certain that he was completely covered up.

"Now, listen to me, you tin-horn cops," he said. "You haven't anything on me and you're not going to have. What you've got on Joe

Mindler, I don't know. Right now, I'm not certain that I'll even keep him as a client."

Sheester paused a moment to let that cryptic remark sink in. Then he turned toward the door, which Quick Trigger had closed behind him.

"I've got business to attend to," he said. "And it'll take a warrant for my arrest to stop me from taking care of it. Good-by."

Sheester whipped open the door and Joe Mindler fell flat on his face on the floor! Joe had been peering through the keyhole.

Joe scrambled to his feet, twisted his ill-fitting suit back into shape. He looked mournfully at Splendid Sheester, opened his chinless mouth and spoke plaintively.

"Y-you cain't drop my case, Splendid. I'm dependin' on y'u."

Sheester paused long enough to strike a pose of importance. He surveyed his client judicially.

"Don't do any more damn-fool things then," he said silkily. "I can't protect an idiot."

Joe Mindler looked crestfallen as Splendid Sheester stalked out of the office. Wildcat nudged Slug Minor, nodded toward the door. Slug took the hint. He started out after Sheester. For all his size and ungainly appearance, Slug Minor was as good a trailer as there was in the department.

Wildcat swung on Joe Mindler. Joe swallowed a couple of times and tried to avoid Wildcat's eyes.

"Where did you go with Sofia Lascalles?" Wildcat snapped.

Joe Mindler's mouth dropped open.

"I . . . I didn't go nowhere," he gulped. "Sh-she knocked me out."

Joe told what had happened to him in the speedboat. Then he handed Wildcat a shocker.

"Sh-she was just here with Splendid." It developed that Joe had arrived shortly after Sofia Lascalles and had listened to most of the conversation through the door. When Sofia departed and when Wildcat arrived, Joe said he had been hiding in a broom closet in the hall.

Wildcat's eyes hardened. The conversation between Sofia Lascalles and Sheester did not enlighten him a great deal. It merely heightened his belief that innocent, twelve-year-old Karen Lascalles was the center of some deep secret that was beset by constant tragedy. And it made him certain that Karen's life, as well as that of Tiny Traeger, was in immediate danger of being

snuffed out to further some sordid plan.

"What do you know about the will?" he asked Joe Mindler.

"Huh?" Joe asked. "Oh, nothin'. Sheester told me there might be one. He said that he thought a guy named The Whisperer had it, and that it might interfere with his plans for gettin' me some of that estate."

Joe insisted that his reason for following Sofia Lascalles was that he thought she might know something about it. The gangling youth from New Jersey insisted that he had been acting on his own, then.

"I gotta interest in this thing," he complained. "I gotta right to find out what's goin' on, ain't I?"

Quick Trigger rumbled in sudden rage.

"You haven't any right to knock two police officers to the pavement," he roared.

Joe Mindler's weak eyes widened.

"Huh? Was them guys *you?* I thought they was some of her helpers," Joe insisted.

And there it stood. For a moment, Joe Mindler really looked too dumb to be fooling anybody. But further questioning was interrupted by the sudden reappearance of Slug Minor. The burly chauffeur of Wildcat Gordon burst into the room like an erupting volcano.

"He got away from me," Slug panted. "Fooled me like I was a rookie cop!"

Slug said he had followed Splendid Sheester to the water front. The lawyer had walked along the concrete wharf of South Street as if he had no particular destination, Slug told Wildcat. Then there was a sudden roar of a speedboat and before Slug could stop him, Sheester leaped from the wharf into the moving boat.

"I shot at the rat!" Slug moaned, crestfallen. "But I guess I missed him."

Wildcat Gordon looked hard at Joe Mindler. He knew, now, that the solution of this thing lay somewhere on the water. But he also knew that New York City has many miles of water front. The search could lead in almost any direction. He questioned Mindler about the boat he and Sofia Lascalles had escaped in. Joe insisted that it was her boat; that she took him along with her rather than be recaptured by Wildcat and Quick Trigger.

Wildcat snapped one more question at the gangling youth. He was far from satisfied with the answers he had gotten so far.

"Kent Howell was murdered shortly before you showed up on the Howell estate," he said. "Where had you been before you had your encounter with The Whisperer?"

Joe Mindler gulped, looked down at his shoes.

"I . . . I was jest sort of wanderin' around," he offered. "I'd been there quite a while, I guess."

Quick Trigger grumbled in bewilderment. Joe Mindler didn't seem to realize he had just talked himself out of any alibi in the murder of the one person he might have thought stood between him and the Howell wealth.

Wildcat shook his head.

"Take him in, boys," he snapped. "Keep him in sight and both of you stay where I can reach you."

Quick Trigger nodded. He and Slug took Joe Mindler in tow and left Splendid Sheester's office.

Wildcat Gordon was about to do the same. Conflicting bits of evidence raced through his mind. It seemed that the harbor police would have to furnish some sort of an an-

swer for Wildcat. Splendid Sheester and the Lascalles were gone without a trace. And Wildcat had a sickening feeling of certainty that something horrible was going to happen —soon!

Too many things seemed to be reaching a climax to suit Wildcat Gordon. And they were things that he did not like to contemplate.

It was undoubtedly the confusion of thoughts racing through his mind that caused Wildcat Gordon to tarry those last few moments in Sheester's office. It was that hesitance that caused him to be there when the phone rang.

The voice was the high falsetto of the thug who had told Sheester about the stronghold in Long Island Sound.

"Say," the falsetto voice squeaked into the phone, "I gotta get some dry clothes. You can find that dump without me. You can hardly miss it."

Wildcat Gordon imitated the oily tones of Splendid Sheester. He said it would be all right for the thug to go, but told him to repeat the directions.

When he hung up, Wildcat Gordon began to move with a speed and a certainty he had not previously been able to muster. Whatever the showdown was going to be, Wildcat knew that it was right at hand.

And he knew that The Whisperer would be there when it happened!

CHAPTER XII.

THE WHISPERER FOLLOWS.

There was no question in Wildcat Gordon's mind where Splendid Sheester was headed. The conversation repeated by Joe Mindler between Sheester and Sofia Lascalles indicated that the oily lawyer had some reason to kill Karen Lascalles.

And Wildcat knew that whatever happened, Tiny Traeger would possess too much information to be allowed to go on living. Wildcat leaped to a phone and quickly dialed a number. When the phone at the other end clicked, Wildcat began speaking rapidly. He didn't wait for a voice to answer him.

The number he dialed actuated an automatic recording device in two places. One was in his private radio room and chemical laboratory at headquarters. The other was in Quick Trigger's apartment.

Wildcat's message was explicit. It instructed Quick Trigger and Slug to take half a dozen picked and well-armed men in a harbor-patrol boat to the fortress in the Sound. Wildcat stressed caution in the approach to the island. He was afraid that an open assault by police would bring about the immediate death of Tiny Traeger. There were few men he would trust on a mission as delicate as this one.

Wildcat stood up then and strode from Sheester's office. He knew now that Splendid Sheester was directing gangsters in this thing. Whether Sheester was the master mind who directed the removal of the murder machine from Howell's Acres, he could not be sure. There were still too many conflicting paths to get a clear picture of the mystery of Stepan Howell's murder.

The angle of the Lascalles, he could not fathom at all. If that queer pair were interested in protecting the interests of their daughter, and if they knew the contents of the will written on the gelatinous sheets, Wildcat could not understand why they had not immediately come forth with the will.

He could not be sure who had hidden the wealth of Stepan Howell. It was possible that Splendid Shee-

ster had managed to rifle the safe-deposit vault before Howell's death. His insistence on an immediate inspection of that vault could have been an effort to cover up the fact that he already knew it was empty.

Wildcat raced down the stairs that circled the elevator shaft. On the second-floor level he snatched up the black brief case he had dropped there on the way up to Sheester's office.

It was not Wildcat Gordon, but The Whisperer who ran swiftly out into the lower Manhattan thoroughfare. The crime fighter flagged down a cab. He gave the driver the address of Quick Trigger's warehouse apartment on the Hudson River water front and shoved a ten-dollar bill under the driver's nose.

"Make it in five minutes and the ten is yours," the ghostlike figure whispered.

The driver's hair stood on end. He recognized the voice of The Whisperer. The ten dollars was a welcome gift. But more than that, the cabbie wanted to get rid of his passenger. He made the warehouse corner in four minutes.

"Keep going," The Whisperer said. "And don't look back!"

The driver followed both instructions to the letter. The black-clad battler padded swiftly to the elevator entrance to Quick Trigger's apartment.

Two things combined, however, to prevent The Whisperer's visit from being as secret as he had hoped it would. One was a precautionary watch that thugs were keeping on the warehouse apartment. Instructions had gone out that Wildcat and Quick Trigger should be watched.

The underworld knew that Tiny Traeger had been kidnaped. And it knew that Quick and Wildcat would move the buildings of Manhattan, if need be, to find her.

The other item that caused The Whisperer's visit to be disturbed was the lever controlling the automatic gas defense of the apartment. As he was going up alone into the empty apartment, The Whisperer was forced to disconnect it.

As the elevator whined upward, three dim figures darted into the lower foyer. The noise of the elevator machinery blanketed the sharp snap of the lock on the hatchway to the emergency stairway. Then the dark figures drifted upward toward the apartment.

Inside the penthouse, The Whisperer padded swiftly to the telephone recorder. He could tell from the position of the needle on the disk that Quick Trigger had not yet received his message to go at once to the island fortress.

A soft chuckling whisper escaped the wraithlike figure's lips. The die on this venture seemed cast. The Whisperer would reach the island long before Quick Trigger and Slug could get there. That is, unless, they had intercepted the other message in the radio room at police headquarters.

The Whisperer moved quietly across the room, opened the door to what appeared to be an unused closet. He pressed a button and the floor swung upward, revealing a wide trapdoor leading into the blackness of the abandoned warehouse, below.

Quick Trigger and The Whisperer were the only two person who knew what that old building hid. Not even Tiny Traeger knew there was anything of importance within the bowels of the ancient warehouse. She was always sent away to some other places of safety when it was used.

Down there, there were cells in which Quick and The Whisperer could detain unwilling guests until they had questioned them at length. Usually, they were brought in unconscious or blindfolded. And they departed in the same condition.

Once within that vaultlike interior, not even the hooting of the steamers on the river could be heard.

The Whisperer was bending over the opened trap when the three thugs who had sneaked into the apartment decided to take him. The leader of the trio nudged his companions, making motions with his hands to tell the others what to do.

Their eyes glittered in an anticipation not unmixed with awe. The thugs who bagged The Whisperer would go down in the annals of the underworld as tough guys indeed. The price on the head of The Whisperer would provide a nice vacation in the more expensive places.

The three thugs rushed. They were almost on top of The Whisperer before he heard them. His defense was a peculiar one. He fell flat on his face on the floor. Two of the thugs went right over him. They expected to whirl about when they got in the closet. But there wasn't any floor there.

With yells of amazement, the pair hurtled downward in darkness. The Whisperer of the underworld turned and grabbed the third hood by one ankle. Together, they tumble down on top of his two companions.

The fight in the dark was swift. In the blackness, the intruders were no match for The Whisperer. He slugged them into quick unconsciousness.

Then he had a problem. He did not want to leave the three thugs in the warehouse. If he did, they would have to be slugged into unscious again before they were taken out.

And The Whisperer believed there was a good chance that he and Quick Trigger might not return this time to let them out at all!

So the ghostlike battler did the next best thing. He took them with him. It later turned out to be a wise decision!

Another trap opened on a smooth steel chute. The Whisperer shoved his three charges through the opening and their bodies vanished down the tube. The Whisperer followed them.

TINY TRAEGER

● Tiny is the dark-haired, pert daughter of old Quick Trigger. A diminutive bundle of loveliness, she nurses a secret devotion for Wildcat Gordon.

The cavernous vault in which the three thugs recovered consciousness was not under the penthouse. The chute coursed under the ground and ended directly beneath an abandoned dock on the Huson River.

The mobsters sat up an looked around them. All were bound and gagged. The cavelike compartment was lighted by dim incandescents. The black-clad Whisperer could be seen leaning over the square hull of a hydroplane.

The place was in reality a secret boathouse. From the outside, the sliding doors looked like part of the concrete dock wall. The Whisperer tinkered with two powerful motors. Then he pressed a starter button. The twin engines burst into a roar that nearly burst eardrums in the confines of the cavelike hole.

Then the nemesis of crime loaded his three captives into the hull of the hydroplane. The sliding doors opened automatically. The hydroplane roared out into the river, lifting a plume of spray behind it. The boat climbed up on the second step and roared downriver and around the tip of Manhattan.

The Whisperer grimly set his course upriver and coaxed every ounce of speed from those motors. Just past Brooklyn Bridge, he swung around a huge coal barge being towed by a noisy tug. As he started to swing out again into the center of the channel, one motor began to stutter. It coughed once, then quit altogether.

The Whisperer had to struggle with the wheel to equalize the uneven motive force from one propeller. The speed of the hydroplane dropped to less than half what it had been doing. In that same instant a brilliant beam of light bathed the limping boat. A harsh voice barked an order across the water.

"Pull up or we'll fire!"

Then came another cry of amazement.

"The Whisperer! Get him!"

One of the largest and fastest boats of the harbor police had trapped The Whisperer. There was a booming roar and a one-pound shell dropped ahead of the crippled hydroplane.

A harsh whisper of dismay burst from the lips of the mysterious crime fighter. He was certain that a broken ignition connection had caused his right motor to cut out. It could probably be fixed in half a minute. But The Whisperer did not have half a minute.

The big police boat was crowding him as it was. Suddenly, an eerie chuckling whisper rose above the roar of the hydroplane's one motor. The Whisperer lashed the wheel. Then he whirled to his three captives. He asked each of them a single question.

Then he untied one crook, swiftly threw him overboard into the path of the following police boat. The man was plainly visible in the brilliant beam of the searchlight. Curses roared from the men on the deck of the police boat. But they paused to pick up the swimmer.

Each of the thugs had admitted that he could swim. Each of them had preferred to chance the water of the East River to a continued voyage with the black-clad fighter.

The Whisperer heaved all of them overboard. Then he leaned quickly over the silent motor. The hydroplane was doing nearly thirty with her single engine. The delay in picking up three swimmers should hold the police back for a matter of minutes. If The Whisperer was right; if it was merely a fouled ignition point—

Then The Whisperer found it—a

singe wire frayed through by friction. Swiftly, he scraped back the rubber insulation and twisted the raw copper ends together. The right motor roared suddenly back to life. The ghostlike figure leaped to the wheel, unlashed the ropes that held it. Once more, the plume of foam and spray rose behind the hydroplane. It roared upriver at sixty miles an hour.

The motors' roar drowned out the chuckling hiss of triumph. The green eyes of the nemesis of the underworld glinted strangely.

The hoods had unwittingly befriended their enemy. For once, crime had come to the aid of The Whisperer!

The wraithlike figure was still chuckling over that as the hydroplane roared around Riker's Island and lined out for the Sound.

CHAPTER XIII.

SOFIA PROPHESIES MURDER.

Henry Bolton was undergoing an extremely bad half-hour. The only small morsel of comfort he could have felt was that Wildcat Gordon was not present.

Henry had committed the error of phoning the mayor that he had an arrest of such tremendous consequence that it would behoove the city's chief executive to make an appearance at police headquarters.

The mayor of the City of New York was an honest man. He took a great deal of quiet gratification in the Wildcat Gordon's ruthless methods in bringing crooks to bay where orthodox procedure would certainly have failed. But the mayor was an elected official of government. It was an unfortunate necessity that he had to lend his ear to the powerful leaders of organized vote-getting machines.

Henry, of course, had been certain that he could deliver to the mayor the mysterious underworld figure, The Whisperer. After all, when Henry phoned the mayor, he had just locked up The Whisperer in the stronghold that Wildcat, himself, had used for so many important criminals.

The mayor harrumphed as he faced the long-nosed deputy.

"I understand it was suggested to you that The Whisperer be turned over to Commissioner Gordon," he rumbled.

Bolton squirmed.

"Y-yes. But Commissioner Gordon was not present." Bolton grew bold. "He isn't present, now, your honor. He never is when things have to be done."

Bolton was desperate. He was enmeshed in a web of his own making. Bolton undoubtedly was wishing for a miracle to extricate him from the grilling he was undergoing.

Unexpectedly, he got it. Henry was standing beside a huge cabinet of books on criminology that Wildcat kept close at hand. The long-nosed deputy was not visible from the door of the office that led to the main corridor.

It was through that door that Slug Minor burst. Slug's mouth was already open with the yell he expected to be for Quick Trigger's ears alone. Slug's deep-set eyes saw only Quick Trigger and the mayor. Slug liked the mayor. He looked upon him as a man who did his best with a lot of political bosses.

So Slug let go with what he had.

"Wildcat wants a picked bunch of the boys out on Long Island sound," he blurted. "Tiny's there and there's hell to break!"

Slug's face transformed into an expression of acute pain when he saw Henry Bolton leap from behind

the big cabinet of books.

"Hell!" he muttered. "Where'd you come from?"

Henry Bolton saw a chance to redeem himself in the eyes of the mayor. He swelled pompously.

"Our duty is to help Commissioner Gordon," he said grandly. "Where is it we are wanted?"

Slug gave him the location as Wildcat had dictated over the telephone. Bolton frowned.

"That is out of our jurisdiction," he warned Slug. "Perhaps we should phone the Westchester police."

Slug Minor bleated his disapproval. If Wildcat had told him to come to Timbuktu, Slug would have put on his hat and gone there. Boundary lines meant nothing to Slug Minor when Wildcat Gordon needed help.

Something else occurred, though, to bring Henry around to that viewpoint. The door of Wildcat's office burst open. The desk lieutenant rushed into the room.

"The Whisperer just got away from the harbor cops," he yelled. "He was going north in the East River in a hydroplane!"

Henry Bolton whipped around.

"North on the East River!" he blurted. "That means he's heading for the Sound, too. Let's go! This time we'll get him."

Quick Trigger grunted. He wanted to corral the kidnapers who were holding Tiny. But he was not so sure he wanted Henry Bolton along when he did it. He looked quickly at the mayor. The executive nodded. There was nothing improper in Henry's sudden zeal. The mayor could not stand in the way with so many things at stake.

"Go ahead!" he said. "I will communicate with Westchester. You have my authority to follow Gordon's instructions."

Joe Mindler created something of a problem. The gangling youth from the wilds of New Jersey was handcuffed in a chair. Quick knew Wildcat wanted to question Joe. He was afraid some smart lawyer might come along with a writ of habeas corpus if he put Joe in the cooler. So Quick decided to take him along. That way he could keep him in sight.

"Huh?" Joe said when Quick told him he was going along. "Nuthin' doin'! I ain't goin' no place where there's shootin'."

But Joe found that he didn't have a great deal to say about where he was going. Slug Minor shoved him out of the chair and down the corridor. Quick Trigger, Bolton, Slug and Joe were in the squad car that roared down to the Battery. The same police launch that had intercepted The Whisperer was waiting for them.

Bolton paused to question the three half-drowned thugs who had been fished from the river. They didn't know much; they were only half conscious when they left the secret boathouse on the Hudson and could only give a vague account of what had happened to them.

Bolton whined orders to the harbor cops to get the fast boat ready.

No one noticed that Slug Minor was following Henry around like some great St. Bernard. No one but Slug knew that he was trying to find some way to keep Henry home. Slug did not know about The Whisperer. But he sensed the uneasiness of Quick Trigger in having Henry along.

And, anyway, Slug didn't like Henry.

What he thought was his opportunity presented itself when Henry went too close to the edge of the pier. Slug tripped him! It wasn't obvious. Bolton couldn't prove that

Splendid Sheester pumped futile shots at the four hundred pounds of flying death that swooped toward him.

he hadn't fallen over some unseen object on the dock. But Henry went into the slip. He went in headfirst and came up spitting dirty salt water.

"I'll have you on the carpet, Minor," he gulped as soon as he could get a breath. "I'll have you patrolling a beat at Tottenville, Staten Island."

Tottenville is the most remote stretch in the far-flung city of New York.

Slug Minor grinned happily as the harbor cops fished Henry from the dirty water of the bay. He thought everything was going to be perfect. He knew Henry would not fare forth, dripping wet as he was.

But he was due for sudden disappointment. Henry looked Slug over critically as he was fished, dripping, from the chill water of the slip.

"Take off your clothes, Minor," he wheezed. "Take them off and I'll put them on. You're not as smart as you think you are."

And for once, Henry was right. Slug Minor did not look smart as he stood beside the speed launch clad only in his shorts and a blanket.

It was somewhat peculiar to the few yachtsmen and ferry-boat cap-

tains who noticed the stern of the police launch to see what looked like an Indian in his blanket huddled against the cabin, shivering in the cold early morning breeze.

The police boat was moderately fast. She crowded thirty-five. Bolton stood beside the man at the wheel. There was little conversation aboard the boat. Slug Minor found a pair of dungarees in a locker and donned them.

Henry was dreaming about capturing The Whisperer and regaining the favor of the politicians he hoped would some day make him the new commissioner of police.

Quick Trigger and Slug stared unseeingly ahead, thinking about the plight of Tiny Traeger. Quick was also thinking of The Whisperer. The wraithlike battler had eluded the police boat. Perhaps he had reached the island stronghold. That was Quick Trigger's only real hope for his daughter's life.

The fact that the three men were completely wrapped up in their thoughts was probably one reason that no one saw the small speedboat careening up the river. Another reason was that it didn't have any lights.

It was slower than the police launch. It was also being quite inexpertly handled. The man at the wheel of the police launch didn't see it until a collision was almost a certainty! He swung his wheel and tried to go around the unlighted boat.

That maneuver didn't work because the pilot of the other boat tried to escape by turning in the same direction. There was a splintering crash as the two hulls came together. The pilot of the smaller boat dived into the black water with a splash.

The police boat's engines reversed, brought her to a stop. The big searchlight flashed on, showed the bobbing head of the small boat's driver, now swimming frantically toward shore.

Quick Trigger gasped. It was Sofia Lascalles.

"Bring the boat around," Quick ordered the helmsman. "We have to get that woman."

They fished Sofia Lascalles out with a boathook. Sofia mumbled thanks for rescuing her, but she didn't look as if she meant it. Her dark eyes showed stark fear. Henry Bolton snarled and shook his finger at her.

"Where were you going in that thing?" he demanded.

Sofia just looked at him. Her expression didn't change in the slightest. The fear was still mirrored in her eyes. What Henry said seemed of no importance at all.

"N-nowhere," she mumbled. "I . . . I was just out for the ride."

She didn't seem to care whether Henry believed it or not. Bolton snorted in anger. Quick Trigger stepped in between them. He knew more about the situation than Henry did. Slug had told him the entire contents of the message Wildcat had put on the automatic recording device. Quick squinted at Sofia Lascalles. His voice was quite fatherly.

"Splendid Sheester knows the location of the island," Quick told her. "We believe he is on his way there, now."

Sofia Lascalles clutched her throat with one hand. She staggered as if she had been struck a physical blow. A gurgling scream of terror welled up from her throat.

"No, no!" she cried. "He must not get there!"

Quick Trigger's eyes bore down

on the frantic woman. His voice was soft, but it was also insistent.

"Why should Sheester want to kill your daughter?" Quick asked her.

Sofia Lascalles' mouth clamped shut. Her jaw hardened. She looked Quick Trigger straight in the eyes, then shook her head in firm defiance.

"He may not find out," she said simply. "It is best that no one know. I cannot tell you."

Sofia turned and looked resolutely across the river, into the early morning light. Then she shuddered.

"There will be more murder this morning," she said softly. "Of that, I am certain. We must hurry."

Sofia said she would show them where the island lay in the Sound. The twin motors of the police boat resumed their steady hum.

CHAPTER XIV.

DEATH PLAN FOR TWO!

Splendid Sheester had a head start on everyone else who was racing to the stronghold in Long Island Sound. The speedboat that had picked up Sheester was a light craft, but it had plenty of speed. More than half of its length was taken up with a powerful motor.

Sheester's pale eyes glittered evilly as he sat beside the thug who drove the boat. The thug was a crooked-nosed, ratty man with shifty eyes. Two other henchmen crouched in a narrow seat behind them. These two were burly, scarred killers, whose faces were on "Wanted" posters in police departments across the country.

Splendid mopped his bald dome with his blue handkerchief. He licked his lips like some animal anticipating a great feast and muttered to his pilot.

"This must be the place, Squint. If it is, I'll have it all to myself. Nobody else will have anything."

Sheester pocketed his handkerchief and rubbed his thin hands together.

"Splendid," he grated. "Ah, this is going to be splendid."

He picked up a submachine gun, carefully checked the firing mechanism. The thug behind the wheel nudged him and pointed ahead. The first streaks of dawn were just breaking. A tiny island that looked like a jumble of barren rocks loomed ahead.

Splendid looked at the island through a spyglass. Then he checked the chart and tide tables. Squint twisted the wheel, apparently taking a course that would miss the island. Then he cut the motors.

Carried by wind and tide, the little boat drifted slowly and silently toward the island. It was within a hundred feet of the rocky shore before the armed guards there discovered it. There was a hail from one of them.

"Don't land here!" the guard warned them. "If you've got motor trouble, just keep on drifting."

Then the guard recognized the bulging-headed lawyer.

"Sheester!" he yelled. "All out, guys. Come out shooting!"

The guard raised his gun. He didn't fire it. There was a racketing roar from Splendid's Tommy-gun! The guard was almost cut in half.

Splendid barked orders to the pilot of the boat and kept pouring lead into the emerging guards on the island. Squint opened the speedboat's throttle with a roar. The little boat shot ahead, raced the remaining distance to the island. Splendid and the two burly thugs be-

SLUG MINOR

● Wildcat Gordon's untiring effort once saved Slug Minor, then a water-front roustabout, from a framed robbery charge. The giant Slug has since endeavored to repay the commissioner's complete faith in his role as Wildcat's chauffeur and strong-arm aid.

hind him poured out of the boat, then ran crouching toward the nearest pile of rocks. All three of them held submachine guns.

Armed men poured from the subterranean chambers of the island. They carried guns of many different types. The early morning air was split with the roaring cross-fire! Bullets whistled close to the heads of Sheester and his three henchmen.

So swift and unexpected had the attack been that the guards on the island could not take advantage of the rocks that had been placed for shields. Sheester and his aids got to those rocks first, reversed the purpose of the barricades.

Men fell groaning to the ground. The rocky island ran red with blood! The defenders screamed with pain and fear; some plunged from the island and swam toward shore. The few who remained suddenly surrendered.

Splendid Sheester was in control of the island!

With a grating laugh, the lawyer leaped from his place of concealment and raced toward the open door of the underground quarters. A roaring challenge issued from that door. A huge, masked man rushed from it, pumping lead from two large automatics!

Lead plunged into Sheester's body, slammed him backward to the ground. Sheester fired, as he fell. The masked defender twisted, blood gushing from one shoulder. Sheester fired again and the masked man doubled, groaned in pain. Slowly, he sank to the ground. His groans became fainter.

With a snarl of satisfaction, Sheester staggered to his feet. The crooked lawyer had taken the precaution of wearing a bullet-proof vest. The force of the heavy-caliber slugs had knocked him down. But Sheester was not injured.

He strode with mincing steps to the prone figure of the masked defender. Hate glinted from his pale eyes. His lipless mouth was twisted into a brutal sneer. He kicked the motionless form.

"You are through now, meddlesome one," Sheester purred. "You are dead. Splendid."

Sheester leaned over, ripped off

the mask. The bearded face of Gregoire Lascalles looked up at him!

Lascalles' black eyes flickered slightly. They opened, stared half-seeing, at Sheester. The burly caretaker's thick lips were twisted in pain. With a tremendous effort, Gregoire Lascalles spat at the man who had come to kill him.

Sheester laughed silkily.

"No longer will you interfere with me," he sneered. "I, Conrad Sheester, shall control all the wealth of Dr. Stepan Howell!"

With a nod of contempt, Sheester barked orders to his henchmen. Then he strode through the door of the underground chamber. Sheester's two burly thugs who had come with Sheester guarded the members of the defending gang who had surrendered.

They were all members of the force of helpers who had been employed by Lascalles to take care of the wild animals on Howell Acres.

Squint hauled the limp body of Gregoire Lascalles to the edge of the island; he dumped it into the cold waters of the Sound. Then he glided swiftly to the door of the underground room, stood guard where he could hear any summons from his master.

Inside that camouflaged structure, Splendid Sheester strutted like a game cock. Splendid was immensely pleased with himself. He rubbed his hands together gleefully, though he was somewhat puzzled.

There was no one in the big room.

He opened doors leading to other small chambers. The third one he tried brought results. Tiny Traeger and Karen Lascalles were in that room. They seemed fairly comfortable. But both of them were bound and gagged. Karen's eyes went wide with horror when she saw the bulging head of Splendid Sheester.

The lawyer laughed mirthlessly, shut the door and returned to the big room. The two girls could wait a bit. He would dispose of them at his leisure!

Splendid strode to the baby grand piano where there were so many photographs. He sneered as he surveyed them, glared mockingly at the pictures of Sofia Lascalles and her husband. Suddenly, low, gutteral sounds burst from Sheester's throat. He crouched forward, seized two photographs that were together.

One of them was the faded picture of the wistfully beautiful woman. The other was that of Karen Lascalles!

Splendid Sheester looked from one of those pictures to the other. His throat worked strangely; he clenched and unclenched a fist. Animallike noises rushed from his lipless mouth. His face darkened with an insane, overpowering rage; his eyes glittered wildly.

Suddenly a roar of disbelief issued from Splendid Sheester's throat. His face was almost black with rage. Hate and insane malice warped his brain. It was obvious that the man was mad, suddenly driven out of his mind by a discovery of something he seemed certain could not be.

Sheester tore the pictures in two and screamed threats into the room. He stamped on the torn pieces of paper.

"Fooled me. They fooled me, damn them."

He whirled toward the photograph of Sofia Lascalles. He spat at it, cursed it as if it were an animate and living thing.

"You were right," he snarled. "She will die! They both will die!

That is the most important thing right now."

Splendid padded swiftly to the room in which the two girls were tied. The lawyer's body was bathed with perspiration. His eyes rolled insanely. Saliva dripped from the corners of his lipless mouth. He slashed the bonds that held Karen Lascalles; then he cuffed her brutally across the face and shoved her out into the big room.

He hauled Tiny Traeger out there, too. But he didn't untie Tiny. His eyes burned down at the smaller girl.

"You are the last of what I hate," Splendid snarled. "You must not die pleasantly!"

Splendid paused and stared ahead of him with unseeing eyes, as if trying to conjure up some terrible death to suit his suddenly unbalanced mind. Squint, the thug guarding the door, interrupted him. The little killer bounded into the room.

"A boat's comin', boss," he squeaked. "Hadn't we better grab the swag and scram?"

Splendid swung slowly around to face his henchman. Squint stumbled back; even he could see that his boss had gone mad. He opened his mouth to say something else. In that instant, Splendid sprang at him. Surprise numbed the thug's reactions. Splended ripped the Tommy-gun from his hands, pointed it at him.

"The money can wait," he said in a flat, tense voice. "We will get that anyway. There's still Joe Mindler."

Squint protested.

"B-but—" he began.

Splendid motioned with the machine gun.

"Take the girls to the boat," he rasped. "Move fast or I'll fill you full of lead."

Squint jumped. He shoved the two girls ahead of him. Outside, the roar of the hydroplane motors of The Whisperer came up the Sound. Splendid listened for a moment, then he grinned cruelly. Those roaring motors would blot out the sound of his Tommy-gun. Splendid strolled slowly toward the two burly thugs who guarded the three survivors who had surrendered.

With no more emotion than a duck hunter, Splendid held down the trigger release of the Tommy-gun! He grinned crookedly as he watched the five men fold up like so many empty sacks.

Then Splendid turned back to the boat. He put the two girls up front beside Squint. He climbed in behind them, cradling the Tommy-gun on his knee.

"There will be no witnesses to prevent my getting Howell's cash through Joe Mindler," he purred. "If you do as you are told, my friend, you may live to enjoy some of it."

Sheester laughed queerly. He began to babble about the ravening jaws of great jungle cats. He told how he had once seen a Bengal tiger pounce upon an unsuspecting native in the Congo. Splendid described that gory meal in most complete detail. Then he snarled, reached out and cuffed Karen Lascalles. He looked contemptuously at Tiny Traeger.

"They love human flesh!" he snarled. "And now, we bring them breakfast!"

Squint shuddered. His career in crime had never brought him face to face with such a vicious monster. His hands trembled as he eased open the throttle of the powerful motor.

Black, threatening clouds billowed up on the eastern sky. The first streaks of dawn were not sufficiently far advanced to reveal the moving

boat. Squint kept her speed checked for a mile or so, to hold down the telltale spray.

Then Sheester grated orders to him. The motors opened wide, and the boat lined out for a trip across the Sound. It was there that Dr. Stepan Howell had built his unusual estate.

And it was on that estate that great jungle cats had gone unfed since the murder of Dr. Stepan Howell!

The Whisperer's hydroplane roared into the little island dock, sending a great arc of spray behind it. The mysterious foe of crime leaped from the cockpit and raced over the rocks.

A whispering gasp of horror burst from his lips at the sight that met his eyes. There were bodies everywhere; the ground red with blood.

The Whisperer raced toward the open door of the subterranean chambers. His green eyes glittered strangely. There was pain etched on the face of the ghostlike fighter. It was the pain of certainty that he had been too late to protect Tiny Traeger and the innocent twelve-year-old girl he was certain was going to her death along with Quick Trigger's daughter.

Swiftly, the nemesis of crime searched those rooms. It was just by chance that his slanted eyes noticed the four torn bits of paper underneath the baby-grand piano. The Whisperer picked them up, pieced the two pictures together.

A whispering hiss of astonishment escaped from the black-clad fighter's lips. He looked from the wistful face of the elder woman to the dark eyes of Karen Lascalles.

The Whisperer knew, now, why something had stirred in his mind when he had seen that other picture in Dr. Stepan Howell's laboratory-office. He knew instantly that Karen Lascalles was the daughter of this sad-eyed woman here! The likeness was inescapable when the two pictures were viewed side by side.

The Whisperer knew that, but he did not know why Gregoire Lascalles and his wife had taken such pains to hide that will on gelatinous paper. Nor did he know why Sofia Lascalles was so certain that Splendid Sheester would be determined to kill the little girl.

It could not have been merely the will. Sheester must have guessed that any will would award a large slice of Howell's estate to one of the Lascalles. The Whisperer knew it was some strange secret that Sheester had not known when he talked

to Sofia Lascalles in his office.

The ghostlike figure shook his head in bewilderment. He drifted out of the big room. He had to find a trail that he could follow. He refused to let himself believe he was too late to save Tiny Traeger and Karen Lascalles.

He moved swiftly toward his hydroplane. A movement near the edge of the island caught his eye. The Whisperer ran toward that movement. One of the helpers of Gregoire Lascalles stirred faintly. A moan came from his lips. Splendid Sheester had been hurried in his final burst of leaden death. The job was not complete. The wounded man opened his eyes. At first, hope shone in them. Then he recognized The Whisperer and shuddered. There was no reason that he should know the wraithlike fighter was an ally.

The Whisperer leaned over him.

"I am a friend," he said in his soft, low voice. "Tell me what happened, so that I can try to help."

The wounded man let out a gusty breath.

"Lascalles kidnaped them," he said. "Sheester killed Lascalles."

"Why did he kidnap them? Where are they now?"

"To save the girl," the man gasped. "I do not know from what. He took the other because he had to. He was going to turn her loose soon. That was why he wore a mask."

The wounded man was wandering somewhat in his mind. It was difficult for The Whisperer to keep him on the subject. He had to repeat one question three times before the pain-racked brain grasped the important bit of information that The Whisperer must have.

"To the south," he gasped. "Back to the estate . . . to the jungle animals. The girls . . . will die—"

The strain was too much for the wounded one. He lapsed back into unconsciousness. The Whisperer whirled, raced back to his hydroplane. In a second, the twin motors roared into life. The two oversized propellers bit into the water, hurling the aquatic juggernaut across the Sound toward the Long Island shore.

A husky whisper of rage drifted from the Whisperer. He, too, had once seen a man killed by a famished jungle cat. He shuddered. It had not been a pleasant sight.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MISSING WILL!

Henry Bolton's reaction to the shambles on the murder island was perhaps typical. The carnage meant little to the long-nosed deputy.

"The Whisperer did it," Henry accused nasally. "He must be around here somewhere."

Bolton searched for The Whisperer. Sofia Lascalles stood for a moment, stunned. Suddenly, she screamed and ran to the water's edge. A dark figure was slumped in the water there. Quick Trigger and Slug rushed over beside her.

Gregoire Lascalles' big body had not sunk to the bottom of the Sound as Sheester had expected it would. Lascalles had wedged between two rocks. The position of his body was such that his head had remained above water. His eyes flickered, now, and he began to mutter words.

Then he recognized his wife. Gregoire tried to smile, but it wasn't much of a success. Quick Trigger barked questions at the stricken man. Blood flecked Lascalles' lips as he told of the carnage. He did not know of the visit of The Whisperer.

He had been unconscious while the ghostlike nemesis of crime had been on the island.

Gregoire was bitter when he spoke of Sheester. He said he thought Sheester had probably taken the two girls to the estate when he heard the police boat approaching. Lascalles believed it to be the nearest place for Sheester to dispose of his victims.

Then Lascalles collapsed. Quick Trigger and another cop carried him to the police boat. Slug Minor raced into the cellarlike chamber to get Bolton. Rapidly, he told Henry what they had learned from Lascalles.

"We're goin' to the estate and try to head Sheester off," Slug blurted. "Come on!"

Henry Bolton glared at Slug.

"I am in charge here," he snapped. "We don't know that Sheester has gone to the estate. And The Whisperer is expected to come here. We'll wait here and try to trap him."

Slug tried to argue with him. But it wasn't any use. Henry Bolton's one goal was The Whisperer. He didn't know that the crime fighter had already been there and gone.

"O. K., Henry," Slug grunted. "You asked for it."

One of Slug Minor's huge fists whipped up, smashed into Henry Bolton's jaw. Henry's little eyes glazed. He slumped to the floor.

Swiftly, Slug locked the door of the room and raced out to the surface of the rocky island.

"Henry's goin' to stay there," Slug bellowed. "We're to go on to the estate."

Slug leaped aboard the police boat. He hadn't actually lied. If the implication of his remarks were that Henry had ordered them to go on, Slug didn't care. If Quick Trigger's daughter were in danger, Slug would stand trial, go to jail or anything else that was necessary to get moving.

The police boat was halfway across the bay before it was noticed that Joe Mindler was missing. The sight of the shambles on the island had made Quick overlook Joe.

"Forget him," Quick rumbled. The old man looked thoughtfully across the water. He put his mouth close to Slug Minor's ear.

"I'm wondering about The Whisperer," Quick said softly.

The Whisperer did not roar up to the private dock of the Howell estate. He did not wish to give Sheester any more warning than was necessary.

He beached the hydroplane half a mile from the estate. Then he ran along the beach, making as little noise as possible.

Towering elms and oak trees obscured what early-morning light there might have been on the estate of Dr. Stepan Howell. The vast acres were silent except for the restless noises of the animals, unfed since the day before.

The hollow roar of the great cats rose above the other sounds from that row of cages. The cages were a bedlam of noise. It was obvious that something had occurred to excite the wild animals.

The Whisperer spurred himself to greater speed. He was certain that the life span of Tiny Traeger and Karen Lascalles was measured now in seconds! He raced around a clump of thick bushes and saw the cages fifty feet away from him.

Splendid Sheester was just about to leave one great cage. It was empty of animals at the moment. But in the adjoining cage was the huge

Bengal tiger that had almost made a meal of Sheester, himself, the night before. The giant cat bared its fangs, paced back and forth in front of the door that connected the two cages. The door was closed. But a long rope attached to it ran over pulleys to the second cage beyond. It was toward that cage that Splendid Sheester was now backing cautiously.

The huddled forms of Tiny Traeger and Karen Lascalles lay in the center cage—the cage that was empty of danger, now, but would not be so in half a dozen seconds.

An eerie whispering challenge rose from the wraithlike man who raced toward that cage. Splendid Sheester whirled; he paused for a moment in his backward progress. Sheester's face was twisted into a grimace of insane hatred.

He screamed orders to Squint, who crouched in the bushes that The Whisperer was passing. Sheester had not let the skinny thug have his Tommy-gun back again, but Squint was armed with a heavy blackjack.

He was so close to The Whisperer that the wraithlike fighter had no chance to dodge. The Whisperer whirled. But as he did, the bludgeon fell, smashed against his skull!

The Whisperer stumbled, his senses reeling. Squint followed through, swung a second blow! But the skinny thug underestimated the strength and resistance of The Whisperer. The stumbling figure twisted, seized Squint with two compact hands and hurled him to the ground.

The thug staggered to his feet. The Whisperer felled him with one smashing blow, then leaped to the center cage. He ripped open the cleanout door and slid quickly through it. There were four persons in that cage then. The two bound figures of Sheester's intended victims were motionless.

Splendid Sheester whipped out a flat automatic! Cautiously, Sheester crouched forward. The Whisperer reached quickly for his supersilenced pistols. An eerie note of alarm hissed from his lips then. The Whisperer's two guns, his only weapons with which he might save those two girls, had dropped from his pocket in the struggle with the thug outside of the cage!

Splendid Sheester was quick to sense the tremendous advantage that he held. Slowly, he crept across that big cage, wary to intercept any flanking move that might come from The Whisperer.

The nemesis of crime was trapped! Quickly, his slanted green eyes surveyed the cage. Sheester had not yet opened the door behind him. He had plenty of time for that. First, he was going to make sure of The Whisperer. Sheester's bag of game was even bigger than he had hoped.

A leer of maniacal fury twisted Sheester's face. With the glee of a madman, Splendid Sheester took every ounce of satisfaction from the trap into which The Whisperer had fallen. Slowly, he brought up the automatic to end the menace of the black-clad fighter who crouched before him.

Apparently, Sheester was ready for any move that his foe might make. He undoubtedly was ready for any move—except the one which The Whisperer now performed.

With a hissing cry of challenge, The Whisperer leaped straight for the sliding trapdoor that held back the famished Bengal tiger. With one quick motion, he whipped up that sliding panel and let the fero-

cious beast of the jungle bound into the cage with them!

Splendid Sheester let out a roar of amazement. He shifted his gun aim from The Whisperer to the giant Bengal. The tiger stood still for a moment, his tail lashing in indecision.

Three figures in that cage were completely motionless. The Whisperer lay quiet beside the two huddled girls. Softly, his voice hissed a warning to Splendid Sheester.

"The door, Sheester. The door behind you. It is closed!"

Splendid Sheester whirled. He couldn't help it. In that split second, he could not remember whether he had left the door to the other cage open or closed.

Any big-game hunter knows that a cat will strike first at a moving object. A hunting or angered tiger will pass up a motionless prey to spring at one that is trying to get away.

The Whisperer had depended on that; he had gambled the lives of two girls and himself on Splendid Sheester's reactions. The Whisperer won that gamble.

Two things happened simultaneously. A woman's scream of terror welled up from outside the cages. And the Bengal tiger sprang.

Splendid Sheester pumped futile shots at the four-hundred pounds of flying death that swooped through the air toward him. Splendid screamed in terror. The tiger roared in pain and rage as lead slugs tore through his flesh! Then the beast struck Splendid. There was an awful crunching of bone and flesh.

Splendid Sheester's dying scream turned into a sobbing gurgle.

Quietly, with almost no perceptible motion, The Whisperer edged the two girls toward the cleanout trap through which he had entered. The great beast was too busy to notice anything save the dying man beneath him. When the Bengal did turn around, it was too late. The access trap was closed and the great cage was empty.

The woman who had screamed rushed up to the two bound girls. Her arms went around little Karen. "Oh, my baby!" she sobbed. "You are safe."

Tears streamed down Sofia Lascalles' face. Her eyes were stark with the horror of the spectacle she had witnessed. But there wasn't any haunting fear in them, now. They sparkled oddly as she saw policemen drag the mangled body of Splendid Sheester from the cage.

Quick Trigger was pretty busy, himself, untying Tiny Traeger. Tiny became voluble as soon as the gag was taken from her mouth.

"What a man!" she gasped. "I wish Wildcat were more like that Whisperer."

Quick Trigger grunted and tried not to grin. He and Wildcat were never sure how much Tiny Traeger knew or guessed. The compact bit of femininity had more than her share of womanly intuition. And if she did suspect any relationship between Wildcat and The Whisperer, she took great care not to let anyone know about it.

In the confusion The Whisperer had disappeared.

A motor car roared down the road, raced up the driveway. The car had been borrowed from a nearby garage. But Wildcat Gordon had to give some explanation of how he got to Howell Acres.

"What's going on here?" Wildcat demanded. "I seem to be getting to places when the shooting is all over."

Sofia Lascalles stood up. Tears were in her eyes.

"I am sorry we were so difficult about all this," she confessed to Wildcat. "But we feared that Sheester would kill Karen if he learned that she was the daughter of Dr. Howell, by his wife who died twelve years ago. Sheester killed her in the Congo when Karen was born. He swore, then, that he would hound Dr. Howell throughout his life.

"We took Karen as our own child; even she did not know otherwise. That was Dr. Howell's request. Sheester has always been a murderous crook. Even if we stopped him, he warned that men in his organization would kill us all."

Quick Trigger ran a finger around under his collar.

"Why?" he demanded. "Was he crazy?"

Sofia Lascalles nodded.

"On one subject," she said. "Twenty years ago, Sheester married a sixteen-year-old girl and deserted her. She never saw him after that. She met Dr. Howell. He knew about it and arranged a divorce for her.

"When Sheester learned that she had married the wealthy Dr. Stepan Howell, it drove him insane. He murdered her when Karen was born, and we told him that the child had also died. Yesterday, we feared that if Sheester learned that the will left everything to Karen, he would suspect the relationship."

Sofia paused. There was still some tragedy in her eyes. Slug Minor relieved it. He pounded through the night.

"Lascalles has come around," he rumbled. "He ain't wounded as seriously as we thought."

Sofia's eyes brightened. She started to walk back toward the police boat. A new sound made everyone turn. The racketing motor of a speedboat roared into the dock of the estate and stopped. It was Gregoire Lascalles' big boat.

Henry Bolton's nasal voice began to whine orders.

"Get me Slug Minor," Henry yelled. "I'm going to have him thrown right off the force. "I'll have him—"

"You'll have nothing, Henry," Wildcat snapped. "Slug is the best chauffeur I ever had."

Bolton gulped, started to say something else. Another voice beside him interrupted.

"Gee!" gangling Joe Mindler blurted. "Golly! We found about a million dollars' worth of bonds back on that island."

Wildcat ignored Joe. He thought he knew what was coming. He pretended to pick up a sheet of paper from the ground.

"Gee!" Joe Mindler went on. "I guess if there ain't no will, I'll get a nice chunk of that. Gee!"

An apparent exclamation of surprise came from Wildcat Gordon.

"The Whisperer!" Wildcat barked. "Apparently he left a note."

The note read:

Commissioner Gordon:

The gelatinous sheets destroyed by Angel Nigren at Sheester's order were blanks, prepared to trap the killers. The original sheets of the will have been mailed to your office. The estate will go to Karen Lascalles.

Faithfully,
The Whisperer.

"My, but I'd like to meet that man," Tiny Traeger sighed. "Socially, I mean."

Tiny was looking in Wildcat's direction. But it seemed that she didn't even see him.

THE END.

Continued from page 6

things are now, most stolen cars are recovered without much loss or damage, because police and insurance companies have developed an excellent system for tracing cars. But Milton Lowe makes a stolen car lead into a "Murder Picnic" on Page 99. You'll get a big kick out of this story, we assure you.

Our next issue will greet you with another great Whisperer novel, all complete in one issue, and more fine shorter stories and features. The novel, "Chariot of Fire," will be especially interesting. Down in the Bowery, in New York's lower East Side, where the dregs of humanity find some rest and comfort, is a mission that seemingly is just like many others of its kind. But is there any connection between this mission and the robberies on Park Avenue? And the murders?

The police can find nothing wrong. The man who conducts the mission is willing to help; there is nothing to hide, so far as he is concerned. The police also raid dens and dives in the vicinity, but still nothing comes of it.

Again, it is a case for The Whisperer, for he can get into the heart of places the police cannot even officially approach, or, if they do approach, their very approach makes all things come to a halt, so there is nothing they can do. But The Whisperer finds that he has stepped into something bigger than surface indications have pointed to, and that the people behind it have no intention of taking interference from police, The Whisperer, or any one else!

That is only the start of the case. There are more complications to it; more heart-pulls, more action, more mystery, with every page. It's a great follow-up to the current novel, and will make you wait even more eagerly for the third issue.

There will, of course, be plenty of good shorter stories for your enjoyment, so plan to get our next issue. Also, tell your friends about The Whisperer, and have them try this magazine. So many people are looking for just this type of entertainment, but do not know where to get it. If you pass on the word, not only will you be helping this magazine, but you will also be helping your friends find the kind of entertainment they like to have.

All the stories in this issue, and future issues, will be complete. You need never wait for the next issue to get the answer to the complex situations presented. And with the nice trimmed edges, good paper, excellent illustrations and clear type, you'll find you have to go a long way to get anything better than this, or any Street and Smith publication.

Finally, don't forget—we're always glad to hear from you!

THE END.

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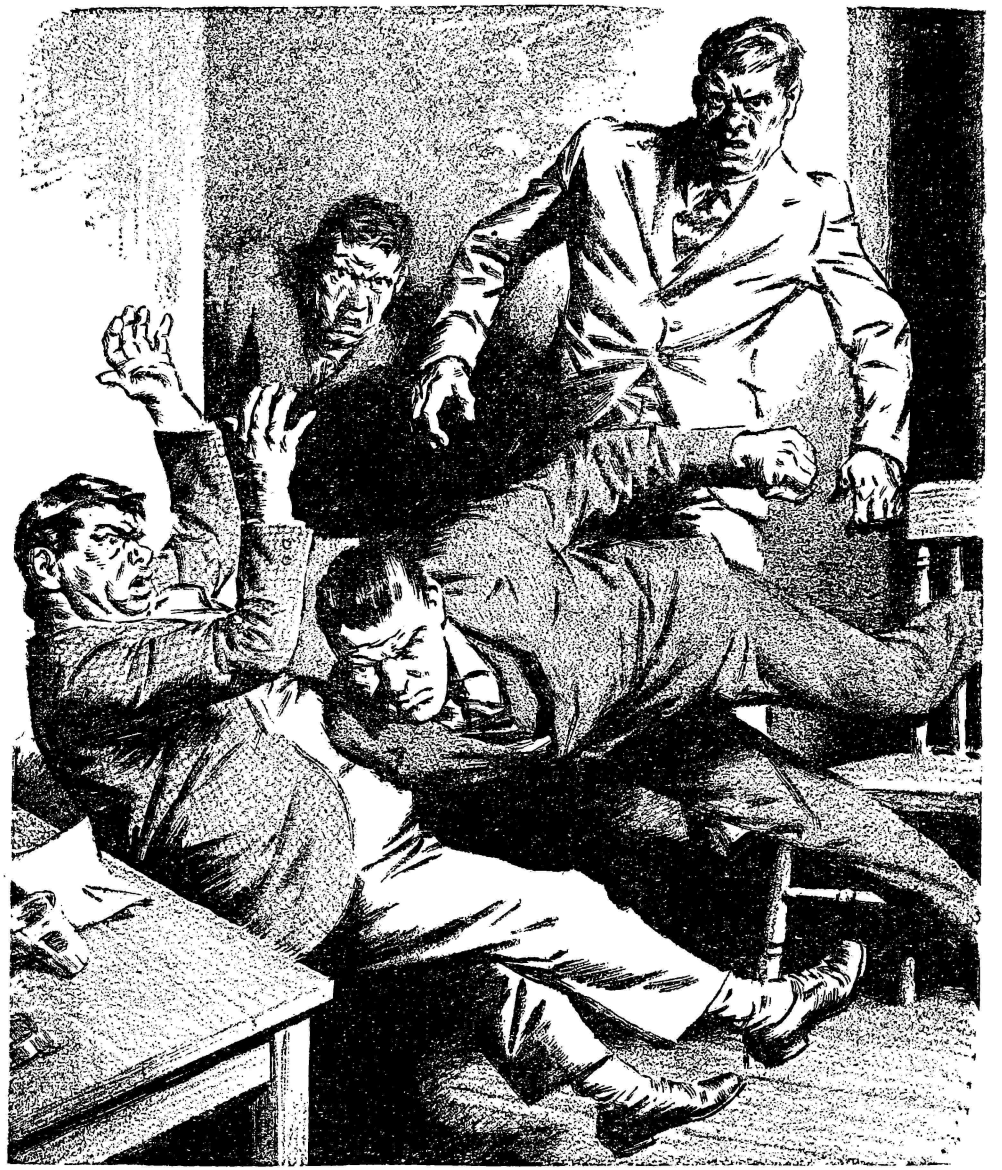

DETECTIVE BILL GIVES A LESSON

By George Allan Moffatt

Detective Bill Shannon stopped suddenly on the darkened street. Ahead of him, in the weak shadows of the yellow street lamp, he had seen a man dart inside a doorway.

Shabby houses lined the street,

old tenements where hungry, dirty children lived and where tired, haggard-looking mothers had little time to pay attention to them.

But it was night, now—an hour before dawn—and the street was deserted; the windows of the rickety tenements were dark. At the far end of the street was the river, and the blast of a tugboat shattered the eerie silence of the night.

Detective Bill Shannon, his powerful body leaning forward a little, and red face expressionless, started walking again. He came to the doorway where the man had disappeared. A hand shot out with the speed of a striking rattler. Fingers closed on Detective Shannon's right wrist.

A voice said: "Shannon?"

"O. K.," Shannon said quietly. "What're the instructions?"

"Go to the end of the block, turn to the right and, five doors down, enter the tenement building," the voice in the doorway said. "Remember, if any cops come, you won't live to see the boss!"

Shannon smiled and grunted: "I have the instructions. Now, get those filthy fingers off my wrist."

The fingers left his wrist. The man darted out of the doorway and disappeared into the darkness. Shannon remained standing near the doorway.

He was still smiling; but when Shannon smiled, it meant he was ready for action—fast, dangerous action. And standing near that doorway, he knew that he was walking into a death trap where he would have little chance for action!

It all seemed fantastic and absurd to him, the message that had come to him via the underworld grapevine that Ape Mullin wanted to see him.

For three weeks Shannon had been turning the city upside down to find Ape Mullin and his killers. Three months before, Ape Mullin, rising out of the underworld in a meteoric blaze of criminal glory, had established a series of rackets that held every small merchant in the throes of ghastly terror.

In these months, Ape Mullin and his killers had murdered twelve merchants and bombed twenty stores. Shannon, hard-boiled and relentless, had driven Ape Mullin and his gang into hiding. The last murder they committed had given Shannon the clue to send Mullin to the electric chair.

The only catch in this plan was the fact that Ape Mullin had managed to perfect a hide-out that the combined efforts of the city and State police couldn't uncover.

And from this hide-out, Ape Mullin directed his killers with an arrogance that made the police look foolish.

Then from the underworld came the tip to Detective Shannon that Ape Mullin wanted to see him. Shannon was hard-boiled enough to know that this was a death trap—as perfect a death trap as any fool ever walked into!

Detective Bill Shannon wasn't a fool. He was the ace detective of the police force, a man that every crook feared and hated. But he had a certain amount of stubborn fury that sometimes made him do things that looked like the actions of a fool.

He had a personal score to settle with Ape Mullin. The last merchant murdered was old Sam Solomon, a kindly old man that had known Detective Shannon when he was a dirty-faced and very hungry little boy on the streets.

Old Sam had fed him and had helped him. It was old Sam that saw that he got a chance to get more schooling than most of the other street urchins.

Old Sam was dead, now—murdered with the animal brutality with which Ape Mullin murdered all his victims. A machine gun from a speeding car had filled the old man's body with bullets.

Detective Shannon did a strange thing when the news was flashed to him. Something like a faint smile came to his lips, but those that knew Detective Shannon knew what that peculiar smile meant.

It meant that somebody was going to pay for the murder of old Sam!

So Detective Bill accepted Ape Mullin's invitation to walk into a death trap. Ape Mullin feared Shannon more than anybody on the force—feared and hated him.

Shannon knew this well, but he appeared on that dark street as he had been instructed.

And, now, he had received his final instructions from the man that darted out of the doorway. Shannon looked around him. He was alone. He knew it would be futile to try to bring police help. He knew Ape Mullin's men had been watching his every move long before he reached that street.

He started walking. The peculiar little smile came to his lips as he turned the corner and neared the fifth house, the house he was to enter.

The door to the house was open. He walked inside. The corridor was dark and silent; the air, dank and musty. The house had been vacant for some time. No sounds came from the blackness around him.

Shannon's fingers gripped his gun. It was halfway out of his coat pocket. He walked on tiptoe, his ears straining to catch any sound.

One came at his right, a little to his rear. It was the soft fall of a footstep. He swerved, his gun coming out of his pocket as he did!

There was a sickening crash on his head! Stars popped in front of his eyes. His knees buckled and he felt a funny sensation in the pit of his stomach. There was another blow. He toppled to the floor.

He struggled weakly, but consciousness left him in a cloud of Stygian blackness!

There was a roaring in his ears. Pains were shooting through his head as consciousness started to return. The pains increased. He remembered walking into the house. Then he remembered everything.

He opened his eyes. A dazzling light blinded him. He closed his eyes and then opened them slowly, accustoming them to the light.

At first all he saw was a ceiling; then he heard voices, low and mumbling voices.

Suddenly a booming voice over him said: "He's waking up, boss."

Shannon turned slowly. He was lying on a floor. He looked up.

And a little distance from him was the leering face of Ape Mullin. "Hello, Shannon," Mullin said softly. "It was nice of you to pay us a visit."

Detective Shannon raised himself up on his right elbow. Every part of his body was numb; his head was throbbing with pain.

He looked at his wrist watch. It was ten minutes to nine. He had been out nearly four hours.

"The boys gave you a little too much of a welcome," Ape Mullin said in his whispered voice. "We thought you'd never wake up."

Ape Mullin stood over Shannon, his legs spread a little apart, and he wasn't a pleasant sight. He had a powerful, squat body, with abnormally long arms and large shoulders.

He looked like a gorilla walking upright. His face had all the hideous features of a gorilla—beady eyes, low forehead and puffy jowls.

"We had to get rough, Shannon," he added. "You ain't exactly on speaking terms with us, and we wanted to make sure you'd get up in this room."

Shannon rubbed his face with his hand. His head was clearing, and blood was flowing back into his numbed muscles. He struggled to get up. None of the men around Ape Mullin stopped him. He got to his feet. Little lumps of muscles stood out on his jaws. His hand slipped down across his coat pocket. His gun was gone.

He glanced quickly around the room. It was large. There were no windows. New plaster covered the places where they had been. The rest of the walls were old and covered with a cheap paper that was peeling in many places.

There was one door. It was thick and covered with a sheet of iron on the inside. Along the edge of the ceiling were several air ducts that ventilated the room.

"Not a bad hide-out, Ape," Shannon said. "It's clever, being right here in the midst of things and a place we wouldn't suspect. The boarded windows and that steel door make the room soundproof."

"Yeah!" Ape Mullin's beady eyes seemed to grow smaller and the leering smile left his lips. "We need some soundproof rooms—sometimes."

"It helps," Detective Shannon answered with his enigmatic smile, "when you want to kill somebody."

"Naturally," Ape Mullin agreed. "But we didn't bring you here to kill you, Shannon."

"Indeed." The smile still played on Shannon's lips. "Perhaps, you just wanted to have a nice friendly talk about how you murdered old Sam Solomon. I have a witness that will send you to the electric chair for that murder."

This crack didn't bother Ape Mullin. He picked up a whiskey glass and fumbled with it idly.

"We don't like the heat you cops have turned on," he said. "We want you to help us turn that heat off. It interferes with our business—and our profits."

"That heat," Shannon shot back, "will be turned off when the juice in the electric chair has done its work on you, Ape."

Ape Mullin smiled and shrugged. "That doesn't sound very nice, Shannon." His whispered voice was lower. "You are going to help us because you are the only person in the city that can get that freckle-faced kid of Chief O'Shea's to leave his home and come here."

The muscles in Shannon's face seemed to jump into rigid knots. Color left his face. He suddenly felt sick all over.

"Ape"—his voice was low and hoarse—"if you touch that kid, I'll kill you if I have to come back from the grave to do it. If you touch that boy—"

"Dead men," Ape interrupted with a soft laugh, "don't come back from the grave. But we ain't going to hurt the kid. We just want him here so the chief will turn off the heat. We'll keep him as a hostage to make sure the heat's turned off. We know all about you and that kid.

A note from you will bring him anywhere."

Shannon's face was so tight that it seemed every muscle was stretched across it. Jimmy O'Shea! The ten-year-old son of Chief O'Shea was the mascot of the force.

The boy's freckled face and his broad grin and his laughing blue eyes were contagious. He knew every man on the force by his first name, and every man knew Jimmy.

But Jimmy's favorite was Detective Bill Shannon, and Shannon's favorite was Jimmy. The rough and hard-boiled detective spent most of his spare time with Jimmy. Jimmy said Shannon was giving him a course in being a detective.

"We figured you might cause trouble about the note," Ape Mullin added. "So we've already got the note written. All we want from you is your gold shield. You and the kid have an arrangement that your shield is to be handed to him if you want him to meet you anywhere."

Shannon was staring at a small door that led to the bathroom. Ape Mullin's words cut through his brain like a red-hot iron. He did have an understanding with Jimmy that whenever he wanted him to meet him any place, he was to send his gold shield.

Nine o'clock! Jimmy would be playing in the rear yard of his home. He would be alone. A note and the shield would bring him to wherever the note directed.

It would bring him unless—

Shannon continued to stare at the open bathroom door. Suddenly his body relaxed and the strained look left his face. He knew Ape Mullin could get his shield. He also knew that he would never leave that room alive!

Ape Mullin wasn't letting the man live who could send him to the electric chair. Ape Mullin's death trap had been set for a twofold reason—to get Jimmy and to get Shannon out of the way.

Shannon didn't care what happened to him. It was all in the game, and he hadn't kidded himself that his end would be anything but what he faced, now.

"You have it figured out pretty well, Ape," Shannon said. "Mind if I sit down? Maybe we can talk this over. Your plan has a weak link—a very weak link. Sure, you can get my shield and you have the note. But how do you know Jimmy will come?"

Shannon sat down. He was stalling for time—time to think. His eyes were still on the bathroom door. He took a toothpick out and stuck it in his mouth, a habit he had when he was worried.

Ape Mullin didn't care about the toothpick. He didn't care about anything, because Shannon was as good as dead already!

Detective Shannon saw Ape Mullin fumbling with the note that had been written to Jimmy. The note! Ape Mullin would get his shield, but—

Ape Mullin nodded to two of his men. Shannon's eyes darted upward and rested on Mullin, who was holding the note. The two men started for Shannon to take his shield!

Shannon made no move until the two were almost on him. Then his two legs shot out with lightning speed, his heels cracking on the shins of the two men. They bellowed with pain and leaped back. As they did, Shannon's body left the chair in a headlong lunge that carried him headfirst to the squat and powerful body of Mullin!

His right shoulder hit Mullin full in the stomach, and the killer went down with a sickening grunt. His back crashed against the table.

Shannon whirled Mullin's body over. Then he grabbed the note addressed to Jimmy!

Three of Mullin's henchmen were charging for Shannon. He picked up a whiskey bottle, hurled it at the leading man. It hit the hood on the head and he went staggering back, holding his eyes.

The other two men were diving for Shannon. He brought his heels up. One smacked the first man in the teeth and blood spurted. The man went down, cursing vilely.

Shannon came up on his knee, his right shooting out in a straight piledriver blow that connected with the side of the other man's head. The killer's dive came to an abrupt end as the man flopped to the floor in a jerking heap.

Shannon was on his feet. The other two henchmen had backed away. Their guns belched fire, and the echoes of the deafening roar in that soundproofed room were almost as terrific as the roar, itself.

Shannon lunged headfirst for the door. The bullets clipped his clothes. A man jumped in front of him and he swerved in his lunge. The next thing he knew, he was going headfirst into the bathroom.

He landed on the floor, with pains shooting through his shoulder. His arm had knocked a can of powder over and it was burning his eyes. He heard the thundering voice of Ape Mullin yelling at the men to hold their fire.

Shannon twisted over on his back, then came up on his knees. A faucet was dripping. The bowl had water in it. Shannon kicked shut and locked the door as two of Ape Mullin's men came charging for it.

Their bodies slammed against the

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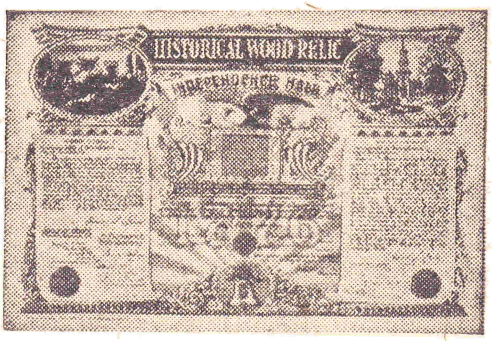

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door. Shannon shook his head. The bathroom was a trap. There were no windows. The men were crashing against the panel with their shoulders.

The door was creaking on its hinges. Shannon backed from the door, waiting for it to crash. The toothpick was in his fingers. It was a superstition of Detective Shannon that a toothpick was his lucky piece.

His lucky piece! He was on his knees, now, working frantically. The door left its hinges with a splintering of wood.

Then men came lunging into the room! Their bodies hit Shannon and sent him back against the wall. A blow on his head made him feel weak all over. He felt fingers snatching his shield from his vest.

His senses wavered. He was only vaguely conscious of what was happening. Then he knew he was being dragged out of the bathroom.

He was thrown in a chair. His brain cleared. Ape Mullin was standing in front of him, glaring at him with a face twisted with hate.

"I didn't have the boys kill you"—Ape Mullin's voice was higher than a whisper now—"because I want that kid to know who led him to his death. I want him to see his great big hero die with a bullet in his head."

Shannon looked at the henchmen. One of them was gone. He had taken the note and the shield!

In twenty minutes Jimmy would be there and—

Ape Mullin stood in front of Shannon, legs spread apart and his long arms dangling loosely at his sides. His beady eyes gleamed with hate and the lust of murder.

Shannon's mouth was dry. He wet his lips. One thought kept pounding in his head: The man with the note would soon be at Chief O'Shea's house. The chief was at the office. Jimmy would be at the playground at the back of the house.

Jimmy was as good as dead, even now! Shannon knew Chief O'Shea and he knew that kidnaping of Jimmy wouldn't cause him to turn the heat off Ape Mullin.

It would put the heat on more, with every detective on the force ferreting out Ape's hiding place. Jimmy would die! Ape Mullin would kill the boy with fiendish fury—just as he was going to kill Shannon in a few minutes.

The silence in the room was ghastly. Shannon could hear the thumping ticks of his wrist watch as it ticked those fatal seconds away.

Then Shannon spoke. His voice was clear and easy. He said: "You've got a perfect plan, Ape, but it has one weak point that will cause you to fail."

"When that kid is in our hands," Ape Mullin sneered, "there won't be any weak links. If the chief talks business, the boy will be O. K.; if he doesn't, they'll find his body along a country road."

"Let's have a drink, Ape," Shannon said. "I never did like the idea of dying on an empty stomach."

Ape Mullin continued to stare at Shannon, but he reached behind him and grabbed the whiskey bottle and swung it around and handed it to Shannon.

"Take a swig, Shannon," Ape Mullin sneered. "You haven't got long to live."

"How long?" Shannon asked as he looked at the bottle.

His wrist watch told him that twelve minutes had passed since the man left with the message for Jimmy. He could go in a closed

car and make the trip in less than that time. By now, he must have contacted Jimmy.

"Only a few minutes," Ape Mullin replied, "and then—"

Shannon kept his left hand around the neck of the bottle. He said to Ape Mullin: "Now, I'll tell you why you won't kill me and why you won't keep Jimmy here. Give me a pencil and I'll write the reason on a paper."

Ape Mullin's beady eyes were suspicious, but his curiosity was greater than his suspicions. He reached in his vest pocket and pulled out a pencil.

Shannon leaned forward and wrote on a newspaper that lay on the table. He sat back when he had finished and the paper was in his hand.

"Look at this, Ape," he said, "and you'll know the reason."

Ape Mullin leaned over the paper. His eyes caught the words:

BECAUSE I'M GOING TO KILL YOU, MYSELF, APE!

The stocky head of Ape Mullin started to jerk up when he saw the words, but Shannon's right arm flashed out. The arm went around the neck of Ape Mullin; and the next thing the racketeer knew, he was flying through the air over Detective Shannon's head.

The chair went backward with the weight of Mullin's body. Shannon and the racketeer crashed on the floor, a fighting and cursing heap. The bottle in Shannon's hand crashed down on Ape Mullin's head! Ape groaned weakly and flopped over on his back.

Shannon's right shot out, grabbed Mullin's automatic; then the detective pivoted on his toes as he started upward. Two guns roared near him! The bullets cut through his coat. There was a shooting pain in his left shoulder, his fingers suddenly went numb, and he dropped the whiskey bottle.

The gun in his hand roared. One of the four men was racing toward him. He went down, holding his throat. A bullet hit Shannon in the leg. A feeling of sickness swept through his body. Then the sickness left and his left side was numb.

He dived headfirst for the table; landed behind it as bullets splintered the legs and the top. Shannon didn't stop under the table. He dragged his left leg after him and rolled over and over until he came to a large cabinet.

He got behind it as a barrage of bullets cut across his chest. He struggled to turn his body around. He brought the automatic up and fired twice. One man went down. The second bullet went wild.

Shannon lay on the floor, behind the cabinet. His left shoulder was wet with blood. The rest of his body was numb. His senses were wild and incoherent.

He had three bullets left. He could remember that much. Three bullets and then—

Ape Mullin was struggling to get to his feet, grunting and groaning as he did. Shannon couldn't see him, but he could hear him. He could hear Ape bellowing orders to rush the cabinet, but his men didn't follow those orders.

None of them wanted to stop the bullets from Shannon's gun. A silence followed. No guns roared. Shannon remained lying on his stomach behind the cabinet. He remained there in a daze for five minutes—ten minutes.

Ape Mullin was roaring orders to his men, but Ape didn't show him-

self. That was what Shannon was waiting for. If he could kill Ape Mullin, he might save Jimmy.

He couldn't save himself, but with Mullin dead—

Four guns roared and bullets splintered the cabinet! A man was crawling on his hands and knees to the rear of the cabinet. Through his blurred vision, Shannon saw him. The gun in Shannon's hand roared and the man went down.

There was a bellowing roar in front of Shannon and two men came charging for him. His gun roared again. One of the men went down; the other leaped back. Ape Mullin roared to him, but the man didn't advance.

A barrage of bullets from Ape Mullin and the other man's gun splintered the cabinet. Some were coming through, but Shannon was on his stomach and the bullets passed over his body.

One thought seared his brain: *Only one bullet left to get Ape Mullin!*

In Shannon's distorted thoughts the memory of Jimmy flared up, and then he thought of poor old Sam Solomon. He thought of the other poor devils Ape Mullin had killed—

Shannon gathered his strength. He lunged forward, out of the protection of the cabinet! A bullet thudded somewhere into his back.

There was a film forming over his eyes, the gray film of death! He saw two men in front of him. He didn't know which was Ape Mullin.

He brought his gun up. He squeezed the trigger. The gun belched fire and one of the men went down.

But it wasn't Ape Mullin! Shannon heard the roaring laugh of the apelike killer. Mullin knew Shannon's last bullet was used. Then something hit Shannon in the face! It was Ape Mullin's heel.

Shannon's head went back. He heard the grating laugh of Ape Mullin. He opened his eyes. Ape Mullin was standing over him. He had a revolver in his hand. It was pointed at Shannon's head!

"O. K., hero," Ape Mullin sneered. "You asked for it and now you are going to get it. The kid is coming."

Shannon saw the gun in Ape Mullin's hand straighten out a little. He saw Mullin's finger start to squeeze the trigger!

He heard a door open. It was the man bringing Jimmy in! Shannon tried to lunge forward, but there was no strength left in his body.

Mullin's finger was closing tighter around the trigger. Shannon closed his eyes, waiting for the bullet to crash through his head.

There was a roar, a deafening explosion! Shannon's last thought was that the bullet had crashed through his head.

A wave of blackness closed over him with a thundering roar.

The next thing Shannon knew, he was staring at something white.

Somebody was talking to him. There was a peculiar smell in the place where he was. He opened his eyes wider. He saw he was in a bed —a white bed—and two women dressed in white were standing at the foot.

Somebody was bending over him. He looked up. It was Dr. Bender from headquarters.

"Tougher than an old mule," he heard the doctor say. "He's got five bullets in him, but he'll live."

Then the doctor moved away from the bed. Shannon's head was clear-

ing, and he could see better. Somebody was running through a doorway, headed for his bed.

Shannon saw the freckled and laughing face of Jimmy O'Shea in front of him. Chief O'Shea was holding the boy.

"Hello, Detective Bill," Jimmy cried. "You didn't fool me this time, did you?"

Detective Bill Shannon looked at the freckled face of the boy and answered: "No, Jimmy, I didn't fool you. You'll be a real cop—a great one."

Chief O'Shea said: "I still don't know what it is all about, Shannon. It all happened so quickly that none of us at headquarters have gotten our breaths. A little after nine o'clock Jimmy called me on the phone. He said he received a message from you, saying that you were at No. 15 Flag Street, and that Ape Mullin was there. Jimmy also told me that it said he wasn't to pay any attention to the note handed him by the stranger who had your shield.

"I happened to have known about your foolish attempt to meet Ape Mullin last night; and when Jimmy called me and told me this, I played safe and sent a squad down to that address. They finally got in Ape Mullin's hidden room. They heard faint signs of gunshots in the hallway. They got there just in time to save you from having a bullet put through your head. We have Ape Mullin at headquarters and he is ready to talk so he can escape the electric chair; but he won't escape it."

Detective Shannon looked at Chief O'Shea and grinned: "I guess Jimmy can tell you what happened. I'll try to explain myself. You see, a week ago I bought Jimmy a chemistry set. Jimmy wanted to be a detective. I fooled him by sending him several notes with hidden writing on them; then Jimmy studied this chemisty book and found out how to tell if there was any hidden writing on a note.

"When I was in Ape Mullin's hide-out and knew that Ape was going to bring Jimmy there, I took one long chance. I saw a box of chloride in the bathroom. Chloride, if wet, will make the most perfect hidden writing.

"The blue flakes of the chloride turn white when they dry, which happens almost as soon as you write. Then when you heat the paper, the flakes turn blue again and you can see blue writing. I knew nothing I could do would prevent Ape Mullin from getting my shield. He already had the note written. I made a dive for that note and somehow got into the bathroom. As I landed in the bathroom, I knocked the can of chloride over. There was enough water in the bowl for me to mix some of it between my fingers. I had pulled a toothpick out before I made that try, and that toothpick served as the pen.

"I figured that Jimmy would run in the house and heat that note. I had fooled him twice in our game of playing detective. I knew if he heated the paper, he would read the message I had written with the toothpick and he would call you. And that's exactly what he did."

Jimmy grinned proudly. "That's the first thing I did when I got that note," he boasted. "I wasn't going to have Detective Bill fool me again —and he didn't."

Shannon grinned at the chief and said: "He'll make a great cop, chief."

"But not as great as Detective Bill," Chief O'Shea answered with a broad grin.

THE END.

THE CORPSE NEXT DOOR

By Edward Ronns

I had my hat off and was warming my scalp in the sunlight that crept through the office window when the telephone rang. It was a warm day in early spring, and people were coming and going, bustling with business that moved in every direction but mine. There was coffee money in my pocket and dull gloom in my heart. I picked up the phone and said, "Hello."

A melodious voice asked: "Is this Rusty McLeod?"

"Yes."

"This is P. Lexington Grant's secretary calling. Mr. Grant would like to see you."

"Don't kid me, angel-voice," I said. "Mr. Grant already has a private detective. Your boy friend, to be exact—Rudy Mallis. And I hate him to pieces."

The voice was no longer melodious. Icicles dripped from it. "Mr. Grant would like to see you. You may come or not, as you choose."

I didn't quite break a leg getting there. The Grant law offices were down the hall, occupying every inch of space on this floor except the little cubby I called my own. There were about twelve names on the pebbled-glass doors, and all were Grants —the old man, P. Lexington, and a tribe of sons, grandsons, nephews and cousins. All lawyers, and all practically non-entities except for the old man. The biggest law firm in town—that's what P. Lexington Grant meant to the public at large. To me, it meant the biggest client in sight. I'd been trying to pry Rudy Mallis' clutch loose and get under myself—both for P. Lexington's good and my own. Rudy Mallis wasn't the kind of shamus who gave the business a good reputation.

The secretary, Eve Smythe, met me in the vast outer office, sweeping grandly down the aisle between the rows of desks. She walked the same way she spelled her name—affectedly. Her shapely legs had a nice, free-wheeling motion. Rudy Mallis was in luck in more ways than one.

"This way, Mr. McLeod," she said coldly.

"Wait a minute, Eve." I said. "How come P. L. is finally giving me a break? Where's Rudy?"

"Out of town, you big bum." And she wasn't kidding about it. She had long dark eyes that maybe could melt at times; but, just now, she stared at me as if I were something that had come crawling out of a crack in the floor. She was nervous, too. Her face was pale under the rouge, and her satin lips were twitchy. "And I hope you flop," she added malevolently, "right on that homely face of yours."

"Thanks for the blessing. Lead on, Little Eva."

We went through the hurdles to the private sanctum of P. Lexington Grant.

He was old and tiny and gnarled, but he was more vitally alive than a lot of young men who've just learned how to vote. He was dressed in a bright-green tweed that made him

I dragged Mallis to the closet and locked him in. He gave me no more trouble after that.

look exactly like a gnome, perched behind the barricade of his desk. He glared at me and said:

"McLeod? You're the private detective who's been wanting a chance with me. Well, you've got it. Got a case for you. Want action on it. Almost personal, I might say." His voice was high and squeaky. "I'm an old man, McLeod, but don't try to take advantage of that fact."

I let it go by and cleared my throat. "I think I understand, Mr. Grant."

"The hell you do," he snapped. "You don't understand a thing." He sounded suddenly wistful, like a small boy wishing he was a pirate. "Nobody understands. So don't start off by lying."

I felt myself color. I put on my hat and walked away from his desk toward the door. We had to get this straight right at the start. Pausing with my hand on the knob, I said:

"I quit!"

That got to him. "Hey?" he squealed.

"You're screwy!" I told him. "Everybody knows it. I don't work for screwballs. If I do, they don't yell at me and call me a liar."

"Sensitive, hey?"

"Just enough."

His seamy face cracked in a wide grin. "Refreshing. No kowtowing. Notice that, Miss Smythe? You might inform your friend, Mallis—Didn't know I was aware you went around with him, hey? I know everything; make it my business to." He turned to me and snapped: "Come back here, you red-headed idiot."

I turned and walked back across the huge carpet to the tiny figure behind the desk.

"Well?"

P. Lexington Grant grinned again. His big pointed ears made him look like an elf. "You'll do. You'll get a thousand dollars and expenses. Strictly a trial, mind you." He reached for a telephone. "You'd better get started."

"On what?" I asked blankly.

"Didn't I tell you? The body! It's in the next room. I'm calling Lieutenant Gilpin, now; so you have until he arrives to make your own investigation."

Now, I was sure he was nuts. Quite a story for the papers. The Wolf of the Law Courts swinging on loose hinges. Then I looked at Eve Smythe, and I wasn't so sure. Her face was chalky, and she kept making swallowing sounds. I cursed and yanked the side door open. P. Lexington was already squeaking into the telephone for the cops.

This second room didn't belong in an office building. It was calm and cool, furnished as a man's den: comfortable leather couch, a Sarouk rug, a fireplace with an electric heater in it, silky draw-curtains over the windows and books from floor to ceiling. A place for any man to call home. Obviously, the woman with the knife in her breast didn't belong in it.

She was seated with her head tilted back and to one side. The knife was in up to the hilt. I didn't touch anything. She was expensively dressed; a woman in her early thirties. I recognized her.

I slammed back into P. Lexington's office. His bright elfin eyes waited for me.

"Know who she is?" I asked.

"How should I know? That's why I hired you."

"Well, you're getting results right off. She's Lillian Bancroft. Her husband is *the* Ralph Bancroft—chairman of the West River Bridge Commission, no less."

"Nonsense! Impossible! You—"

Then he looked at me and mumbled: "All right, I'm not calling you a liar. So she's Mrs. Bancroft. So what is she doing in my den?"

"I thought you might know," I suggested meekly.

"I don't," he snapped. "Never saw her before in my life."

"Didn't she have an appointment with you?"

"Of course not!"

"Then how did she get in there?"

P. Lexington looked surprised. His bright little eyes jerked to Eve Smythe's tall, shapely figure, frozen against the wall. "You, my dear?"

"N-no."

"Sure?"

The brunette moaned and looked as if she was going to faint. "I never s-saw her before."

"All right. Get out. Take an aspirin and wait for the police. Show them in here—quietly, if you can."

I went back into the den and looked around. Another door opened into a short corridor I'd never seen on this floor before—for the simple reason that it went from a private elevator to the back of P. Lexington's office, and no farther. It didn't join the main hall.

"Who knows about this entrance?" I asked.

The elf shrugged. "Myself and a few in the office. Some old clients who've had occasion to see me without arousing undue attention." He squinted at the dead woman. "That's my knife," he announced calmly.

"Where did it come from?"

"The desk over there."

"I suppose you know you're in a jam? A private entrance, your knife, a wealthy society woman estranged from her husband—"

"Was she?"

"Believe it or not," I said caustically, "your firm is handling the divorce proceedings."

"But—"

I ignored him and picked up the woman's purse, very gingerly, and looked for a card. She had been living at the Sheridan Arms. I put the card back, replaced the purse as it had been, and put on my hat. "Tell Gilpin I'll be seeing him."

P. Lexington said: "The lieutenant advised you to wait. Listen, my boy— I— Damnit!" he suddenly squealed. "Why did you have to worry me with your fool questions?"

"Better my asking them here, than Gilpin in the Tombs," I pointed out.

He stared at me and I went out, slamming the door hard in an effort to break the glass panel.

It didn't break.

The Sheridan Arms was a newly built apartment project, privately owned. You weren't allowed to live there if you made more than a hundred a week, but you usually didn't find anybody there under that rating, either. I pulled my hat down over my eyes and crossed the wide lawn and a drawbridge affair to gain the inner court and the lobby. Some kids were playing on the grass. Everything looked peaceful.

The directory told me Mrs. Bancroft's suite number: BJ-12, which meant the southeast tower, twelfth floor, Apartment J. A self-service elevator took me up.

The corridor was wide and airy, with a red-and-white checkerboard floor of composition rubber. I didn't make a sound coming down it. I moved so quietly that I was standing behind the man at the door to BJ-12 before he knew it. He presented a broad rear view of an expensive suit, and the fat at the back of his neck made a double roll over his collar as

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What is SPECIALIZED FICTION?

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he stooped to finagle with the keyhole.

I put one hand on the gun in my pocket and used the other to tap his shoulder.

"Mr. Russo?" I said.

He didn't quite jump out of his shoes. Tony Russo was a big-time politico. He'd come up fast in the last three years, with the South Side vote nestling securely in the cup of his fat, well-greased palm. He was big and he was elegantly dressed and he smelled of the things a gentleman usually smells of—bourbon, dollar cigars and stables. His heavily jowled face was flushed, and his little black eyes snapped at me.

"So what?"

"Allow me," I suggested.

I took a passkey from my pocket, snicked it in the lock of Mrs. Bancroft's door, and opened it. Pushing the door wide, I stepped aside. "You first, Tony."

He didn't move. He licked his lips. "You're Rusty McLeod," he said. "A private snoop." He made it sound like a nasty name.

I just nodded. "Yes."

His black eyes got smaller and uglier. He licked his lips again. He looked at the open door, at the sunlight inside the apartment, at the key in my hand, and finally back to my face again.

"I seem to have made a mistake," he said at last. "I thought this was Charley Jackson's place."

He never knew a guy named Charley. I said cheerfully: "Charley doesn't live here any more. So sorry."

"Yeah? Well, we all make mistakes."

"Sure!"

He hesitated. "Uh—my visit to Charley was supposed to be confidential. I don't suppose you could see your way clear to forget you saw me, could you?"

"I'll think about it," I told him.

He said: "I hope you won't need any persuasion, son."

He said it quietly, but I had visions of odd specimens of South Side hoods hovering in the background. He didn't wait for an answer. I watched his broad back go down the corridor and disappear into the elevator that had brought me up. The whine of the cage gradually faded from the sunlit hall.

I didn't mind letting him go. I was anxous to have a peek at Lillian Bancroft's effects. But I couldn't help hooking up the dead woman and her husband—on the West River Bridge Commission—with a political vulture like Tony Russo.

I went inside and closed the door. The apartment had broad windows opening on a terrace that overlooked the Parkside Drive and the glittering river. The windows were all closed. One wall was of translucent-glass brick with flowered curtains cutting off the sunlight, making the living room dim and cool. The furniture was of light Swedish maple. I headed for the writing desk.

The first two drawers yielded nothing but two hatpins, a compact, an empty purse and a tablet of creamy stationery. I found the brief folder in the third drawer.

There was a seal stamped on the brown cover, in gold lettering:

WEST RIVER BRIDGE
COMMISSION

My fingers shook a little. If my hunch was right, I had dynamite on my hands.

My hunch was right.

Inside the folder, on neatly typed pages, were surveyors' reports, city-

planning figures, estimates, property-condemnation lists—the whole works. The new bridge was going to be built at Georgia Street. That was all. A simple statement of information. And I could have sold that simple statement for a cool half-million dollars. Real-estate operators with this inside dope could buy up property on both sides of the river and—well, figure it out for yourself. It's happened before.

I wasn't surprised to find myself shaking. Sure, I was scared. I thought of Tony Russo, trying to sneak in here; I thought of Lillian Bancroft, stabbed to death in Grant's office. And I stood there holding murder, a half-million bucks and a scandal that would rock the town. All in twenty neatly bound and typewritten pages.

I didn't mean to hold it long. There was only one thing to do. I searched farther and found a Manila envelope, shoved the folder inside and sealed it, scribbled my office address on the outside, dug up a couple of stamps from the desk and went to the door. I listened. No noise. I went out into the hall. Nobody. I made it to the mail chute opposite the elevator bank and dropped the envelope inside as if it burned my fingers.

Then I went back to the apartment. I hadn't been gone long—ten or fifteen seconds at the most. But one of the windows was now open. It had been closed before.

I just had a chance to shift my weight and start out backward through the doorway—and something crashed down on the back of my head! There was pain; there were whirling lights.

And that was all for Rusty!

Maybe it was Lieutenant Gilpin who was responsible for my waking up where I had fallen. Or maybe they thought my entrance was the first for the day. If they'd had the faintest suspicion that I had found that folder, I probably wouldn't have come to at all.

I sat up on the floor and wiped water from my face and looked up into the lean, wolfish face of Lieutenant Alois Gilpin, of homicide. My pal. The apartment had been ransacked, and there were a lot of cops in the room. I couldn't understand that. Gilpin was staring at me and cursing in an absent-minded monotone.

"Snap out of it, Rusty. You're all right."

"Yes," I said and staggered to my feet. "What brings you here, Alois?"

His name was a minor point of friction between us. He snarled: "What in hell d'you suppose?"

"I'm in no condition to guess," I told him. I was playing it close to my chest. I wanted to see what the crowd of dicks around a corner chair was hiding.

"We got a call," Gilpin said heavily, "while we were still over at Grant's, wondering where you'd powdered to—and with what. The call said a couple of phony-looking drunks had carried a dead-looking gentleman up here. They looked phony because they took the back way."

"And slugged me," I said. I swallowed. "Who's the corpse this time?"

"Hubby," Gilpin sighed.

"Huh?" I was still groggy.

"Mr. Ralph Bancroft, to you. Take a look before you break your neck trying to."

So I finally got to see what the dicks were hiding. He sat in a chair, a handsome man with silver-gray hair in a pin-stripe flannel suit. His

nose was sharp and curved, and his eyes were wide open. There was a bullet wound in his chest and a buttoniere of blood on his lapel. He held a .45 Colt in his right hand, on his lap.

I grinned at Lieutenant Gilpin. "Suicide? Remorse for sticking his wife?"

"It would have been, but we got here too soon. Besides, I can see he wasn't here when you were first slugged."

I had to hand it to Gilpin on that score, anyway. He was honest. He wasn't afraid to admit he might have called it suicide. I guess that deep inside we had a healthy respect for each other.

Gilpin looked harassed. "This is pretty big, Rusty. Bancroft's no water-front bum we can ignore. He's important—and so was his wife. So give me what you know."

I hesitated a moment. If I spilled everything I knew, I'd be out on my ear as far as clinching the Grant business went. I had to pull this thing off on my own, spectacularly, to impress P. Lexington.

Sifting the facts, I gave Gilpin a careful summation. I told him about Tony Russo having tried to get in, and that jarred him and worried him no end. I omitted all mention of the Bridge Commission's report. That was my baby. To explain why I'd left and then come back to be slugged, I said I'd followed Russo downstairs to make sure he was leaving.

Gilpin said sourly: "You're holding out on me, Rusty."

I opened innocent eyes. "Why should I? I'm not dumb. A private dick has to play ball—or else. I know that much. My mind is an open book, pal—go ahead and read it."

"Why did Grant call you in when he found Mrs. Bancroft's body in his office?"

"Because Rudy Mallis, the heel, is out of town," I said.

"The hell he is. He was in Grant's office when we left, raising the roof about giving you the case."

I liked that.

I said: "Did you find out what Mrs. Bancroft was doing in Grant's office in the first place?"

"No, it's a mystery." He said it seriously.

I laughed. "It's your apple, lieutenant; bite into it. I'm on my way."

And I went out.

For the rest of the afternoon I let events push me around a little. Rudy Mallis was waiting for me in my office when I returned. He rose from behind my desk as I came in and said softly:

"Hello, heel."

I returned the salutation with cheerful embellishments and found a bottle of Scotch in a desk drawer. It was almost empty. I looked at Rudy Mallis and finished it, sighed and sat down.

Mallis said: "I suppose you know you're through on this case?"

I lifted an eyebrow. "Am I?"

"You are!"

"Why?"

"Because I say so." Definitely, he was menacing. He was a big, chunky man with black curly hair and black narrow eyes and a big chin that needed remodeling—preferably by knuckles. He wore flashy clothes, a big diamond ring and sported a cane. He made me think of a dude out of the Gay Nineties. He said again: "I say so. I'm telling you to lay off."

I said meekly: "Is that a threat?"

"I'm just telling you."

I opened another drawer, took out

a .38 automatic and flicked a handkerchief over it. I checked the clip to make sure it was full of cartridges, and then sat back to stare at him.

He licked his lips. "Just remember."

"Sure," I said.

He went out. A man was lounging against the corridor wall idly picking his teeth with an open penknife. That was all he was doing. I eyed him and he eyed me. He didn't look like a cop. I looked at Rudy Mallis going down the hall. When I closed the office door, I made sure it was locked.

An hour later, when I went down the hall to see P. Lexington Grant, the guy was still there, still playing with his cavities. I kept my hands in my pockets and went past him. Nothing happened.

The elf was dictating to the Smythe creation when I barged in. I tapped the girl's shoulder and said: "Scram, Eve! This is private. Park outside for a while."

She looked at P. Lexington, and he nodded her out of the office.

"It's in all the papers," he complained to me. "Terrible publicity. Reporters have been at me for the past two hours. And what can I tell them? Mallis gave me regular reports—even if they were faked; but you don't say anything. Haven't you any ideas at all?"

"Get an earful," I said. I picked up the phone, got Lieutenant Gilpin on the wire and told him about the hood in the hall. I could see P. Lexington's big ears flapping. I said into the mouthpiece: "Don't bother the guy, Alois. Let him stay there. But I've been holding out on you. I've got some evidence and a change of heart."

He made the wires melt with his curses. I winced and held the receiver away from my ear. After a while I said casually:

"What do you know about the West River Bridge Commission, lieutenant?"

The silence was heavy enough to sink a ship. Then Gilpin said:

"So that's it." He gave a long sigh. "I was afraid that would come out."

"Tell Rusty," I urged.

"Bancroft's copy of the commission's secret report is missing. We've been wondering—"

"I know where that report is," I said. I stared at the office door. "I mailed it to myself. It was in Lillian Bancroft's apartment. I'll have it for you in the morning."

Gilpin sounded suffocated. "Hey, Rusty, I'm coming over and stick to you until it arrives. You aren't safe—"

"Do tell," I sneered. "I won't be here."

I hung up. P. Lexington's mouth was open.

"That report is worth a fortune to an unscrupulous man," he whispered.

"I sometimes regret the McLeod honesty," I said.

"Aren't you waiting for Gilpin?"

I shook my head. "I'll see you tomorrow—and keep some ink in your fountain pen. You'll be writing a check."

The hood was still in the hall when I went out. I walked down to the elevator, and he came with me. I winked at him; he winked back. It was all very chummy, very impersonal. He thought he was going to take me on a visit to see the boys, but he also knew I didn't keep my hand in my pocket just for warmth. I got in my car, and he had a taxi waiting. He didn't follow me for long. I shook him ten minutes later and streaked for the city line. I

spent the day lolling on a grassy hillside ten miles from town, watching the sun go down. No fooling.

When it got dark I drove back to the city.

The closet in my office was suffocating. I left it open just a crack and sat on the floor for most of the night. About four o'clock in the morning it began to rain, and heavy clouds kept it from getting light. My muscles ached with cramp, and I didn't dare smoke.

At six thirty somebody walked down the outside corridor, leather heels clacking on the marble floor. The foosteps went past and faded, and the patter of rain folded in again. Shapes began to take form beyond the crack of the closet door —my desk, the chair, the filing cabinet, the clothes tree. They looked unearthly in the gray, rainy gloom of early morning.

Then a key rasped the door lock, and I stiffened. A crouching figure came in fast, moving sidewise and closed the door with a faint click!

I didn't stir. There was more silence. Then a sigh and a careful footstep; the shape sat down on a corner of my desk. Waiting.

The postman came five minutes later. I heard his key chain jingle; then the brass slot clinked, and paper envelopes crackled as they hit the floor inside the door. I spotted the big Manila one. It lay on top.

The shape sitting on my desk rose with a swift, eager movement and crossed the floor. He fumbled among the envelopes and picked out the one containing the bridge survey! He had his hand on the doorknob when I slid out of the closet and stepped behind him.

"Good morning, Rudy," I said, and I jabbed my gun in his ribs. He moved like a snake, swinging around with his elbow—and knocked the gun right out of my hand! That was all right with me. I got more satisfaction out of the roundhouse swing I landed on his big jaw.

Rudy Mallis grunted and crashed against the door and knocked out the glass with a deafening crash. I yanked him back into the office again and let him have a left to the middle and a second right to the jaw! He gave no more trouble after that.

I dragged him to the closet, locked him in, and called Lieutenant Gilpin.

Then I went downstairs in the elevator and cautiously peeked outside at the dismal, rain-swept street. A car was parked in front of the building. I slid around the back of it, yanked the driver's door open, and said to Eve Smythe:

"All out, Little Eva. Next stop, the Tombs."

Lieutenant Gilpin, two dicks, Rudy Mallis and the Smythe girl, and big Tony Russo—the politico had been in the clink all night playing Q.-and-A. games with Gilpin's boys—were collected in my office twenty minutes later. P. Lexington Grant was there, too. The elf had actually come to me.

I lit a cigarette and said: "It had to be the Smythe girl and Mallis. Lillian Bancroft hadn't come to Grant's office to see any lawyers; she'd come to see Eve. Eve was the one who'd shown her how to come in by the private elevator and hallway. That was plain from the start."

I paused as P. Lexington made a squeaking noise. I said to him:

"Mallis was running a nice racket with his girl, your secretary, planted right in the heart of our town's biggest law firm. He got a lot of inside dope from you through her, which

he used for blackmail.

"Eve had other talents, too. Mallis probably made a deal with Tony Russo to get the Bridge Commission data so that Tony could clean up a couple of million dollars. Eve did the work, beguiling the estranged Ralph Bancroft, who was on the Commission. Lillian Bancroft was jealous, of course, and saw through the plan; but she couldn't talk to her husband, who was divorcing her. Or maybe he wouldn't listen.

"So she took matters into her own hands. She lifted the plans from Bancroft for safe-keeping and came to the office to warn Eve that she wasn't getting away with anything. Probably she threatened to spill the works. So Eve stuck a knife into her."

"But why was Bancroft killed?" Gilpin asked.

"Mallis knows. Mallis killed him. He and Little Eva split fifty-fifty on the murder work. Bancroft was killed because he was going to announce that his plans were missing. All Mallis wanted was a chance to copy them. He figured he could make Bancroft look like a suicide—remorse for killing his wife—and keep the report until he had a chance to give the dope to Russo. Then he'd plant the folder where it would turn up and look as if it had just been misplaced.

"Since I figured that Lillian had come to see the secretary, I made sure that Eve knew what I'd done with the report. When I called you from Grant's office, I knew Eve would be listening behind the door. She was, and Rudy came in here to collect my mail when the postman came. I was here waiting for him."

It took a little while after that to clear the office. An hour later there was just myself and P. Lexington, perched on a chair near my desk. His bushy eyebrows wriggled.

"Do you realize what you've done?" he asked.

"I've got you to hire a new private detective agency to handle your work," I said. "I'm the agency." I opened the desk drawer and looked at the empty bottle of Scotch. It was still empty. I looked at Grant.

"You wouldn't by any happy chance have a little something in your desk, would you? Just to celebrate the contract you're going to sign?"

The elf jumped up and took my arm.

"My boy," he said. "Let's look."

THE END.

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MURDER PICNIC

By Milton Lowe

Blinded for an instant by the headlights of the oncoming car, Sergeant Jed Ring of the State police switched on the spotlight that threw a horizontal beam across the flat highway. As the two cars approached each other, Jed was able to read the license-plate number.

He muttered under his breath: "If I wasn't in a hurry to get to Bill Pardlin's and then report back to the barracks, I'd slap a summons in that driver's lap!"

With a *swish* of air the two cars scissored by each other. The next second the hum of his tires and the

throb of the high-powered motor removed the frown from Jed's long, narrow face.

He sighed, glad that Pardlin's Roadside Camp was his final stop of the day. It had been a tough grind, arguing with camp owners, cajoling them, even threatening at times in order to get the information he wanted.

Orders had come down from the superintendent's office. A check-up of all auto camps was to be made, recording the type of clientele each camp favored, the number of so-called "permanent" guests, and so on. The proprietors as a whole squawked about the survey, and Jed could understand that. But orders were orders, and he carried them out.

"Attention—all cars!"

The radio crackled commandingly. Ring's eyes darted to the pad and pencil, set for the message.

"Stolen automobile reported by William Pardlin, owner of the Roadside Camp. A blue sedan, four-door, this year's model. License number: 3J—1—4—7—6—"

Jed Ring's heart somersaulted against his ribs. The pencil in his hand froze to the paper pad. He jerked the steering wheel spasmodically with the other hand, then righted the car.

The license number just dispatched was the one he had noticed only a half minute previous!

He slammed on the brakes, skidded screechingly; then he whipped the wheel smartly into a U turn. The muscles in his back and arms felt like lumps of steel as he straightened out and began to feed gasoline. The speedometer needle climbed like the second hand of a watch—forty—forty-five—fifty—and still climbing.

Up ahead half a mile he could see the twin dots of the other car's taillights. Judging roughly, Jed Ring guessed his quarry was doing better than sixty miles per hour. He smiled wanly. Instead of a summons, that driver was going to get a quick trip to the barracks. And by the time the law got through with him, he wouldn't go around blinding other drivers.

The trooper's car seemed to sense the chase, catapulted forward, roaring along, gaining steadily. The taillights of the other car glowed suddenly as the driver clamped on the brakes to swerve around the curve. Then the car disappeared from view.

Jed Ring's eyes glittered. He flapped open his gun holster. He wasn't taking unnecessary risks with an auto bandit. A few seconds later he came to the curve, pumped the brake pedal, swerving without much loss of speed.

He came onto the straightaway, prepared to end the chase in one final burst of speed. Then he blinked, throat constricting, amazement creeping over his face.

The other machine was nowhere in sight!

Jed Ring's jaw hardened. He took his foot off the gas, training his gaze down the ribbon of highway for some glimpse of his quarry. But the machine seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth as though it had been devoured.

Jed lowered the beam of his headlights, searching futilely. It was entirely probable that the driver of the stolen machine had become leary, grown aware that he was being pursed and had darted into a side road for cover.

But that wasn't possible. There was no side road in the run directly

ahead. But there was a public grove. Picnickers often went there; travelers stopped to rest. The State provided benches, tables and stone fireplaces for the convenience of the public.

Without intending to make a target of himself, Jed decided to take a look-see. He stepped on the gas, zoomed along the highway, but not too fast. Expertly he manipulated the horizontal beam which spotlighted an oblong patch along the ground to the side of the road.

With his car abreast of the grove, the flat beam penetrated the brush, clumps of bushes. Then it reflected from polished metal—the stolen sedan!

That was enough for Jed Ring. He drove on for another two hundred yards, going over a slight rise in the road, then dipping out of sight of the grove, itself. Braking to a stop, he switched off all lights, radio and motor before hopping out.

He crouched low, hugging the outer fringe of trees, taking full advantage of the heavy crop of wild plant life; used it as a shield. He ran quietly, swiftly toward the grove. Once he stopped, ears strained, body tensing. He remained motionless, trying to listen.

He wondered whether it had been his imagination, or had someone really slashed through the wooded area, heading in the direction from which Jed himself had come? But there was no other sound, save the chirp of beetles, and the croak of frogs.

Plucking his revolver from its holster, he slipped off the safety catch. His long legs enabled him to clear the stunted growths; to cover ground more swiftly. He eased his lanky six-feet-two into the wooded section, moving like an apparition among the trees.

Then he saw the hulk of the sedan, dimly outlined in the moonlight. He didn't move ahead. Instead he studied the layout. The car was less than twenty-five yards away. He could see that it had been run off the cinder path that looped around the grove.

But what puzzled Jed was the fact that the driver wasn't around.

Cautiously, he inched forward, trigger finger tightening on the gun. Sweat was beginning to mist on his face, neck and forehead. The hand gripping the gun was moist.

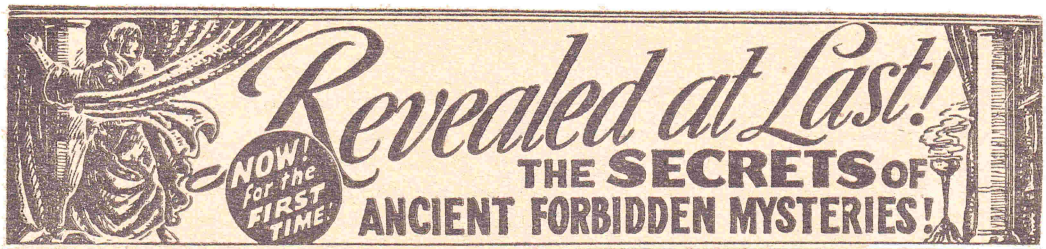
He advanced as stealthily as a panther, halting at the rear of the sedan. Just then, a car shuttled along the highway, splashing enough light for Jed to read the license-plate number. It was Bill Pardlin's sedan all right!

Skirting the trunk end of the car, Jed darted forward, frowning. His eyes glinted as he made for the grove, proper. He took one step—another. Then his left toe stubbed against something soft!

He flung out his free hand, grabbed the low-hanging branch, saving himself from a nasty spill. He regained his balance at once, spun around sharply, looking for something to happen, now that he had betrayed his presence. But nothing occurred.

His scowl deepened; his brow became knitted. Something was definitely wrong. Otherwise, why the unearthly silence? Where was the driver of the stolen car?

Then he stooped to see what had tripped him. His fingers touched something—clothing. His heart ran riot as he traced the form of a stocky man, lying face down. A tremor coursed through Jed Ring as he



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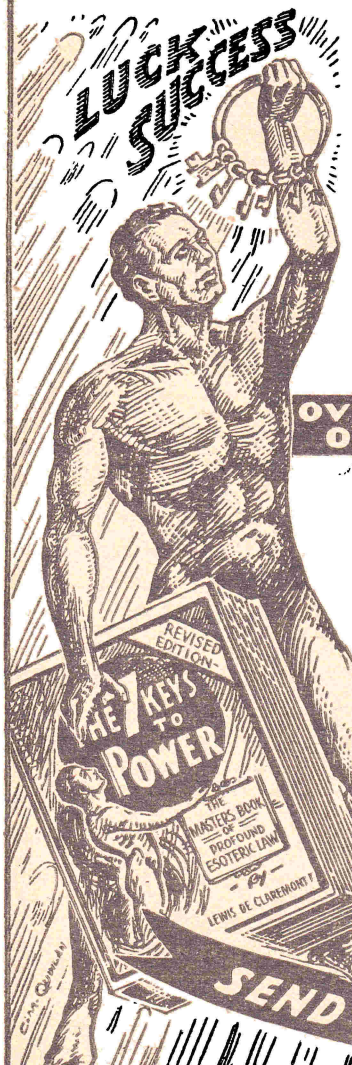

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dropped to his knees.

Hastily, he turned the man over on his back. It was like turning a sack of potatoes. Jed leaned over, pressed his ear to the man's chest, but kept his gun aloft ready to club if this was a ruse.

Jed's mind raced. There wasn't any heartbeat. He reached for the stocky man's wrist, hoping to feel the faint surge of a pulse beat. But it was useless.

The man was dead!

Jed's lips grew taut. The body was still warm, even moist to the touch. Death had occurred only a few minutes ago at the most.

Jed scowled. Was the dead man the driver of the sedan, or had he been struck down by the fellow who had stolen Pardlin's car? He glanced around alertly, then decided to drag the body to the cinder path where he could get a better look at the man's face.

That done, he stooped down. The features, he could see, were chunky; eyes close-set and deep socketed; the chin heavy. The man was strangely familiar to Jed, but for the moment Jed couldn't place him.

Then he noticed the splotch of gore at the back of the skull, directly behind the left ear. A tingle of apprehension skipped up Jed's spine. The killer might still be lurking in the maze of brush, trees and bushes, waiting to see what the trooper would do.

Rising, Jed started for the sedan, gun out in front, ready for action. Perhaps more light would help him identify the victim. The car's headlights would serve nicely and at the same time discourage any attempt by the killer to escape—if he hadn't already left.

He had to pass a cluster of trees to reach the car, and he plunged into their midst without hesitation. He couldn't possibly have seen the fig-

ure silhouetted against a large trunk! Jed started by that tree. Only a vague sixth sense warned him.

Involuntarily he spun, glimpsed the upraised arm. He tried to duck. But the other was too fast. The weapon in the man's hand smashed down. Jed's hat saved him from a bashed skull, but his brain went into a tailspin.

He groaned in spite of himself. His vision blurred and pain knifed through him. With an effort, he steadied himself, stabbed out with his left hand. He nailed his foe on the chest, sending him back for a second. In that interval Jed swung his gun into line.

But the movement was to no avail. There was a slashing noise. Jed's wrist and hand suddenly became numb, as though paralyzed! The Colt slipped from his nerveless fingers.

He lunged, hooking solidly with his left, cracking it to the jaw. It brought a snarl. Then a foot thumped into his midsection, mushrooming agony to all parts of his body! His stomach churned and he felt sick, nauseated.

He gulped a breath, whipped up a left, packing all his weight behind it. The blow grazed the man's chin, brought Jed close enough for the next clout to his temple. He pitched toward the ground, throwing out his arms to arrest the fall. They grabbed the man's frame, hung on like talons.

An oath of rage spat from the killer. Jed tried to smash the chin above him; poked with all his energy. But there was no steam to his delivery. Again, he was clouted at the temple! Everything reeled confusingly before him.

Exactly what happened after that, Jed never knew. His head seemed to swell, then explode. He had no way of knowing he was toppling to the ground. A curtain of blackness swept down to enshroud him. For a scant second he felt as though he were floating through space—then nothingness!

Some minutes later he came to. His throat felt afire, and a maddening din filled his head. He opened his eyes and looked up at the stars. They had never seemed so close, so brilliant.

For a few seconds he lay there without stirring, desperately trying to align his thoughts; to understand what had occurred. But his brain was sluggish, and thinking was a painful task.

He rolled on his side, moaned aloud as a spurt of pain pierced his skull, shuttled down his spine. He put a hand to his head, winced. He felt the warm stickiness of blood and drew his hand away quickly. What the devil had happened?

Bracing himself on his elbow he succeeded in sitting up. He glanced toward the grove, toward the roadway, then saw the sedan.

In a rush of thoughts he was able to remember things. His brain grasped the essentials: the car, the chase, the finding of the corpse, and finally his fight with his unknown attacker.

Just recalling the fight caused Jed to groan aloud. Then another thought struck him and brought a gulp of surprise from him. He was at the mercy of the killer; yet he had not been bumped off. Was it possible he had been left for dead?

That just didn't seem right. Doubt ridged Jed's forehead. It didn't seem plausible that the man who had killed once would hesitate

to kill again. There must be some reason for that.

He got up, limped slightly, making for the car. His bones and muscles ached, and he swayed unsteadily. He switched on the sedan's headlights. It revealed the body on the cinder path, exactly where Jed had left it.

Jed began to frisk the pockets. Almost at once he found a pair of keys—car keys. Other than that, Jed found nothing. His eyes gleamed. The keys had not been overlooked; they had been left deliberately!

He was about to stand up when a glint caught his eye. Eagerly he bent forward, examining the dead man's trouser leg. It was mussed up, dirty, as thought the man had been forced down during a brief struggle. What appeared to be a pin gleamed in the bright light.

It was snagged in the trouser material. Jed saw that it was a small clamp, such as those used in radio to insure perfect contact at terminals. Carefully, he loosened the claws from the material, shook the clamp clean of dirt, then palmed it for study. A turn of wire was still held under the screw portion, and it appeared as though the wire had been snapped off.

Jed's mind seethed with ideas. Finally, he put the clamp into his pocket and turned his attention to the dead man. He recognized the face suddenly, as though its identity had been blurted out by the corpse, itself. Lefty O'Neil!

At that very moment several law-enforcement agencies were seeking Lefty on narcotic charges. It had been rumored that Lefty was hiding out somewhere in this part of the State, but until now not a thing had been learned of O'Neil's whereabouts.

And Lefty was dead—murdered!

Jed went back to the spot where he had found Lefty's body. The ground showed unmistakable signs of a short-lived but violent struggle. But what was more—Jed's breath came rapidly—a gun lay at the spot.

Picking it up hurriedly, Jed swung open the chamber. Two of the six shells in the gun had been fired.

Jed whirled around and hastened to Lefty's body. He hunted for bullet wounds, found none. Death had been caused by a clout behind the ear. The skull had been broken; and, from the evidence available, the gash might have been made either by the jaws of a wrench or a claw-hammer.

Jed shook his own head, baffled.

A theory presented itself. Pivoting, Jed went to the sedan to search the interior. Apparently, Lefty had been meeting someone at the grove; someone who might also be engaged in the narcotic racket. There might have been a falling out, and Lefty had been killed.

Jed cut in on these thoughts. It was too early to try to reconstruct the murder. Besides too many points were unanswerable at that moment.

He tried the ignition lock. A key fitted as he had surmised it would. But a careful scrutiny of the inside of the car failed to further the investigation. Jed went to the trunk with the second key, opened the lock and lifted the cover.

A foul odor assailed his nostrils! He peered in, then gasped. Huddled grotesquely in the recess of the trunk was the body of another man —the body of Bob Warren, an F. B. I. agent!

Livid-blue marks on the side of

the temple and two threads of dried gore showed where the two bullets from the gun had gone. Anger burned in Jed Ring. His hands clenched into knots, his eyes slitted. How did the F. B. I. agent fit into the set-up, anyway?

Warren had appeared at State police headquarters a few days before and had asked questions that seemed to lead nowhere. Had there been any suspicious characters hanging around the vicinity? As far as Jed knew none of the boys had seen any. Warren left soon after, not caring to explain further.

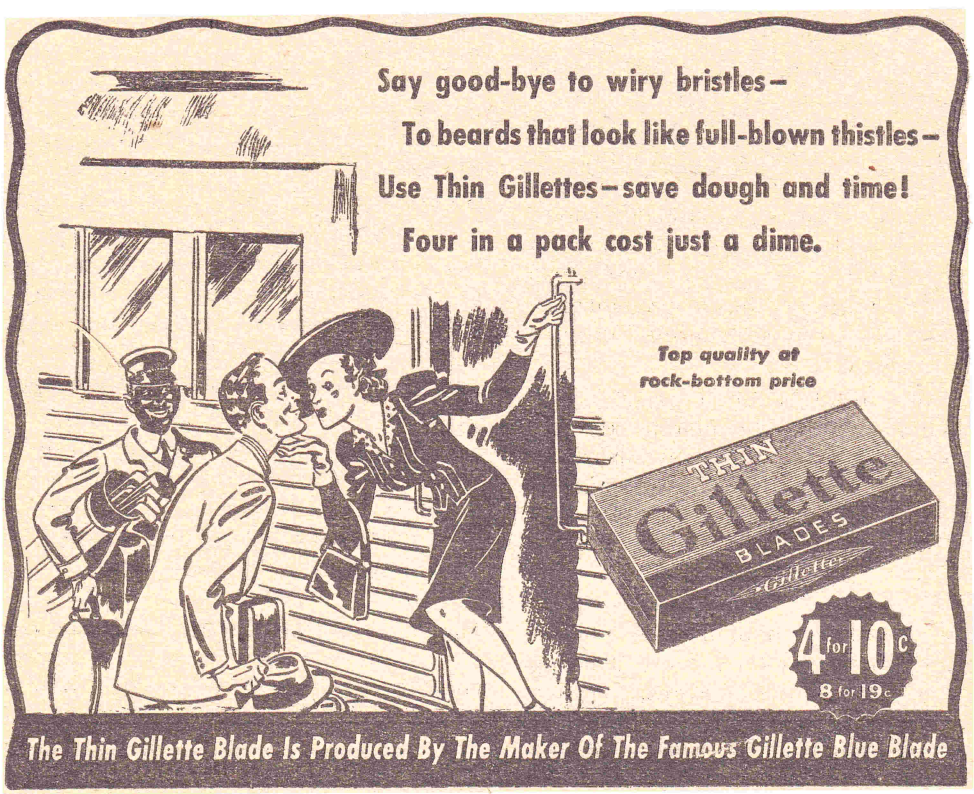
Jed's mind seized upon a possible link. Narcotics! He frowned. F. B. I. men wouldn't be interested in drugs. That belonged to the narcotic bureau. Another idea suggested itself: Warren had been recognized by Lefty O'Neil's mob, and fearing exposure, they had killed the government man.

"Doesn't sound just right," muttered the trooper.

Jed closed the trunk again, then carted Lefty's body to the sedan and dumped it in the rear. The clamp presented a problem. On impulse, Jed scoured the vicinity, examining various trees. On one he discovered picklike indentations.

By the time Jed climbed behind the steering wheel of the stolen sedan, a grim smile was turning the corners of his lips. He started the engine, backed to the cinder path, then circled to the highway. He drove quickly to the spot he had left his own car.

He blinked, hardly believing his eyes. He yanked the emergency



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brake and stared.

His car was gone!

"Pretty smart!" he exclaimed heatedly. "But two can play at the same game!"

The Roadside Camp had the rustic touch. Small log cabins dotted two acres of land. A large house, also of the log-cabin style, was situated to the right of the smaller ones.

Jed had been to Bill Pardlin's place on previous visits and knew the layout fairly well. He drove to the screened-in porch over which a neon sign flashed the name, Roadside Camp. Jed stopped and stepped nimbly to the ground.

He looked around critically. None of the cabins seemed occupied. The garage off the large house had its doors wide open, but there was no car in sight. Jed hastened to the garage and glanced around expectantly. Nothing there of any consequence.

As he walked out he glimpsed the flagpole behind the house. A huge eagle topped it, its wings spread like a weather vane. No sign of the State patrol car. Jed grunted under his breath.

Returning to the front porch Jed entered the main house. Off the porch was a dining room and bar. Tables consumed half the room while the bar took up the entire wall on the other side. A man in a bartender's apron looked up dreamily.

"Where's Bill Pardlin?" demanded Jed.

"In his room, taking a nap," said the barkeep. "Say, you guys find his car?"

"It's outside," snapped the trooper, eying the man keenly. But there wasn't an iota of change in the man's expression. "Get Pardlin out here!"

A door at the end of the bar creaked. The next second a heavy-

set man, almost as tall as Jed, a few years older, came out into the big room. Bill Pardlin's eyes brightened at the sight of Jed Ring.

"What's that? You found my car —where? Did you get the guy who stole it?"

"I think so," said Jed slowly. "But I'm not sure. Know anybody by the name of Lefty O'Neil?"

Pardlin thought for a few moments, wagged his head. "Nope. What does he look like?"

"You'll get a chance to see him—later. Right now, Pardlin, I'd like to know if you've had any guests during the day."

"A few came in to eat and have some beers," said the camp owner. "There was one guy by the name of Jones—or something like that—who took a cabin for the night. He turned in as soon as I showed him to his cabin. Why—what's up?"

Jed Ring's eyelids drooped slightly. "Maybe he stole your car —did you think of looking in his cabin?"

The camp owner stared. "Sa-a-ay! I didn't think of that. But that guy didn't have a car when he came in."

"Take me to the cabin you rented him," ordered the trooper.

"Sure! Come on."

They went out through the kitchen and woodshed, heading straight for the cabin down the front line of rentals. It was in darkness. Pardlin stopped, looked questioningly at Jed Ring. The trooper motioned for Pardlin to rap on the door. There was no answer.

"Knock harder," said Jed. Things were too pat to suit him.

Still there was no reply. Jed half-smiled, strode to the door and tried the knob. The door was locked. Pardlin was jangling a ring of keys, selecting the correct one. He put it into the lock and threw wide the door.

"It's . . . it's empty!" cried Pardlin into the blackness of the cabin.

"Put on the light and let's see," rasped from the trooper.

The camp owner flipped the wall switch. Dazzling light showed the room to have a single bed, a bureau and two chairs. One window, in the rear wall, was latched. Jed noticed that the bed had been lain in. There weren't any clothes or personal effects around.

Jed faced Pardlin. "How soon after you gave him the room did you miss your car?"

"About an hour. I was going to run into town to get some groceries. I didn't think for a minute that this chap could have taken it. I'll never leave the keys in the car again—even for a minute."

"Good idea," admitted Jed. "Tell me, Pardlin. You didn't by any chance hear of the troopers checking up on all camps for suspicious characters, did you? Narcotic peddlers and the like?"

Pardlin paled. "Why—no. Was the man who stole my car a narcotic peddler? Great Scott, man, you don't think *my* camp is a drug outlet?"

"Suppose I don't answer that right now, Pardlin," said Jed sternly. "How about showing me all the other cabins?"

The camp owner's eyes glittered strangely, though his smile was disarming, almost patronizing. He shrugged. "Why not? I've got nothing to hide. This idea about my camp being used as a dope outlet is crazy on the face of it. But you'll have to see for yourself."

Jed assented. He raked the bed with a photographic glance. A big, heavy man had lain there. Lefty

O'Neil and Bob Warren weren't big. Bill Pardlin had been taking a nap!

"Let's go," said Jed.

His mind was sifting various angles to see which fell into a pattern to match his thoughts. He could have sworn that Pardlin had known the cabin was vacant. He had yelled before the light had been turned on. Another odd thing was the absence of personal property in the cabin. None had been in the sedan, and surely Lefty and Warren had possessed other clothes.

The room seemed to have been cleared of everything, save furniture and linen, as if the last occupant's identity was not to be disclosed. Jed wracked his brain for a likely explanation, but it eluded him.

If Lefty had been the occupant and had locked the cabin door from the outside before stealing the car, wouldn't the cabin key have been in his pocket with the other two keys? And if it were not, wouldn't it mean that the key had been taken away—or left as one leaves a key at the desk of a hotel?

Puzzled no little, Jed trailed Bill Pardlin from cabin to cabin. There were fourteen guest cabins, Pardlin told him as they neared the last. That, too, failed to offer Jed anything to get close to a solution.

"That leaves the main house," said Pardlin with a sigh. "Now that you've started this inspection, Ring, you might just as well give that the once-over. I'd like a clean bill of health, as it were."

Jed didn't answer. Outside the fourteenth cabin he halted long enough to count the others. His jaws hardened and he recounted. No doubt of it—there were fifteen cabins, not fourteen! He whirled to Pardlin.

"We've missed one cabin. That one beyond the hydrangea bush!"

Pardlin lifted his eyebrows. "Oh, that one! It's my tool house and workroom. I didn't think you wanted to see it."

"More than ever, right now," barked Jed through his teeth. "You know, Pardlin, this business about your car being stolen doesn't sound right. How could anybody take it without the bartender or you hearing it?"

"Frankie did hear it," said Pardlin. "I was in my room, asleep."

Jed's mouth turned wryly. "Why didn't Frankie tell you, then?"

"Because he thought I was the one taking it out, going for the groceries I told you about. When I came down later he was surprised and told me about hearing the car. I ran out and found the car gone. I called up the barracks right off."

An answer for everything!

Pardlin was darting torrid glares at the trooper, but he kept his temper under wraps. He wasn't spouting like the other camp owners had. Instead of being rebellious as they had been, Bill Pardlin was doing his darnedest to accommodate.

A padlock on the door of the tool shed had to be opened. Pardlin fumbled with his keys, looked twice toward the house; then he dug his hand into his pocket, as though remembering that he had the key in his trousers.

"I thought for a while that I left the key on the board in the house," he explained to the trooper.

Jed's heart missed a beat. His theory of Lefty's having given the key to the bartender before taking the car from the garage had suddenly developed into a fact!

His brain clicked at top speed. Ideas he had scarcely considered

leaped to the fore. Why hadn't he seen things more clearly before this! He shot a caustic glance at the camp owner who was about to enter the tool house.

"I'll go in first," said Jed tersely.

He snapped on the light, motioned for Pardlin to come in. Then he surveyed the place, watching the camp owner out of the corner of his eyes. Pardlin's gaze strayed to the tool chest under the workbench. Jed's lips curled but he bided his time.

Most of the room was taken up with a lathe, the workbench, shelves of supplies and tool racks. Against one wall stood a bicycle. Jed's eyes slitted. Then his gaze went to the coils of wire under the supply shelves. The wire was of the same gauge as that screwed to the small clamp he had found on Lefty O'Neil's trousers.

He took it out, held it for Pardlin to see. "Ever see this before?" demanded the trooper. "That wire up there is the same gauge."

Pardlin didn't seem flustered. "Those clamps are made for that gauge of wire."

Jed's lips curled again, sardonically, "Thanks." By the reply, Pardlin had informed him a great deal more. It told him that Bill Pardlin knew a lot about electricity and its uses.

"Where'd you get it?" inquired Pardlin.

"From Lefty O'Neil's trouser leg. It clung there while he fought for his life—and lost."

"I told you I didn't know any Lefty O'Neil by that name. If that's

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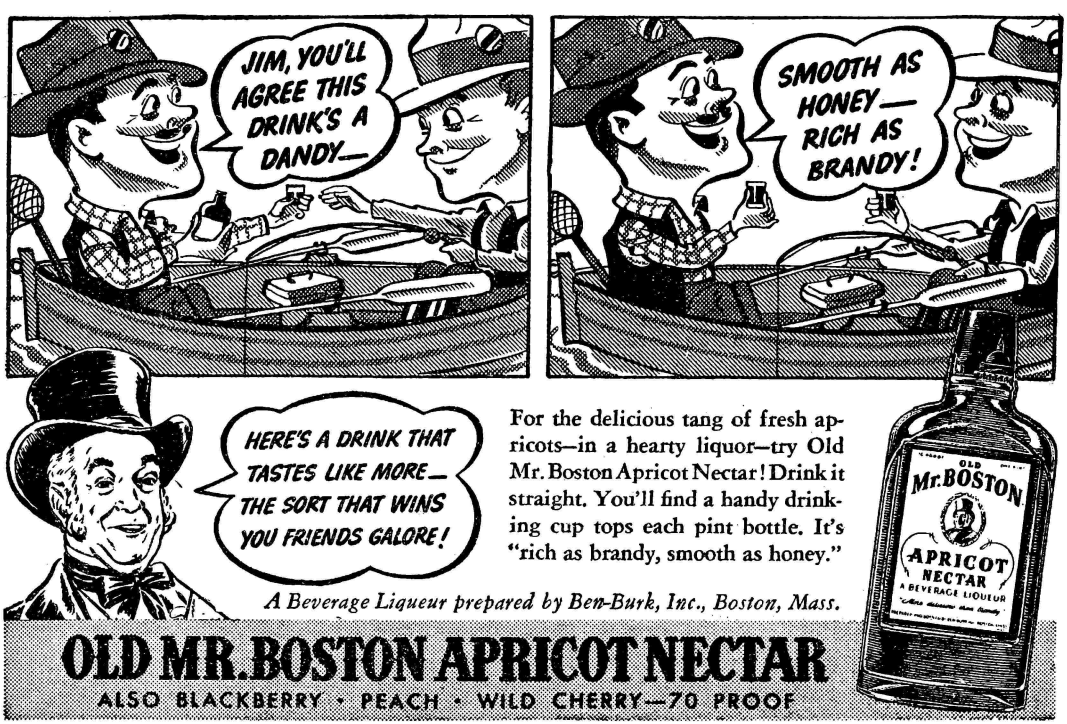

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the fellow who stole my car—"

"Clam!" rasped Jed. He pointed to the tool chest with his left hand. With his right he drew the gun which had been used to kill Bob Warren. "Open that chest—fast!"

Scowling, the camp owner got down on his knees and pulled the chest from under the bench, flapped back the lid. Jed's eyes bulged. Nestling among the tools was a handset, similar to those used by telephone linesmen to tap in. Wrapped around the bakelite which connected the mouthpiece to the earphone were two strands of wire—of the same gauge as the coil on the wall!

"Let's see the ends of those wires," commanded Jed.

Pardlin obeyed reluctantly. He unwound the wire, fished for the ends. On one strand was a clamp just like the one Jed was holding. The camp owner started to draw up the other strand, then hurled the handset into the trooper's face.

Jed fell back, stunned for a second. Then he launched himself at Pardlin. He could have triggered, drilled the man; but he wanted him alive. He whipped up his left as Pardlin started for the door. His fist nailed the man on the side of the jaw, driving him across the room, toppling him over the tool chest.

"That clamp you can't find on the handset is my palm," grated Jed. "It adds up pretty much."

Bill Pardlin glowered, rose to his feet. "You can't prove anything against me. I haven't got any drugs on—"

"Right," agreed Jed. "No drugs. You've got something else."

Pardlin snickered. "You're a pretty smart guy, Ring. It's too bad that you can't go on living!"

At first, Jed thought he was being bluffed. But a glance at the win-

dow, which served as a mirror, chilled his blood. On the cabin's threshold, gun in his fist, stood the bartender, Frankie! The leer on the man's oval face was murderous.

Pardlin laughed, enjoying the trooper's quandary. "Thank you, Frankie. I was wondering where you were."

Frankie smiled wolfishly. "I was laying low, waiting for this guy to tip his hand. I saw Lefty's carcass in the car and figured this copper had a coupla points bothering him."

"I guess you've got me," said Jed slowly. "What did you do to my car, Pardlin?"

The camp owner grimaced. "I ditched it and rode back on the bike. How'd you tumble to me? Might as well talk—"

"Yeah," said Jed amiably, still holding the gun as if Frankie did not have the drop on him. "I might as well talk. I found a tree with cuts in the bark as though sharp steel prongs had been driven in. The marks went up—to the telephone wires. I knew that somebody had tapped in. From there it was simple."

"You mean about my calling the barracks, knowing a call like that wouldn't be checked by the phone company?"

"Yes. That you were at the grove calling about your car being stolen at the time Lefty O'Neil was on his way to the grove, himself—"

Jed Ring didn't finish. He bent over, swinging his gun hand between his wide-spread legs and triggering rapidly! Frankie didn't know what hit him. He gasped, fell back and began to sag.

But Pardlin wasn't standing idle. He grabbed a mallet and walloped Jed with all the force he could muster. Jed somersaulted, lay flat on his back for a full second, dazed. Fireworks went off inside his head.

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Sparks seemed to shower down upon him.

He saw a blob of blackness; then it hurdled him. He knew it was Pardlin, getting away!

Shaking his head to drive off the dizziness assailing him, he staggered to his feet. The gun in his fist seemed to weigh all of a ton. He stumbled, going toward the door. He almost sprawled over Frankie's inert form and grabbed the door jamb for support.

He blinked, focused his eyes at the running figure. The moonlight plainly showed Bill Pardlin going toward the flagpole. Doggedly, Jed bolted after him, ignoring the pain threatening to split his head.

Pardlin cast a harried glance back in his flight. He had reached the pole and he was stopping. Jed couldn't understand what Pardlin was up to. He propelled himself forward; saw that Pardlin had seized the lines that hoisted the flag and was tugging furiously at them.

Suddenly, Jed Ring realized what Pardlin was doing. The unusually large eagle atop the pole began to have a more sinister significance. It gave Jed the real motive behind the deaths of Bob Warren and Lefty O'Neil!

"Stop!" cried Jed. "I'll shoot!"

A snarl of contempt burst from the killer. He halted his feverish tugging, set his back against the pole and lifted his right arm. The moonlight gleamed on the barrel of a gun, the gun Frankie had pointed at Jed's back earlier.

"Who'll shoot who?" he jeered and fired.

A searing sensation ate through Jed's shoulder! But he didn't stop. He sprang, not caring to shoot. He wanted this killer alive. He flung his gun at Pardlin. The killer ducked and the second shot missed Jed.

Powder scorched his face, but he wasn't to be stopped, now. His hands clawed out and fastened on the killer. Pardlin brought up his knee; caught Jed in the groin. But the trooper was beyond feeling physical pain. He grabbed the killer's gun hand and wrenched.

Bone crunched and a yell of anguish bellowed from Pardlin. With a twist Jed hurled him away from the pole. Pardlin bounded up; started to flee. Jed tackled him around the knees and brought him down. They rolled over and over, panting and kicking and slugging.

Each tried to get his hands on the other's throat. Pardlin succeeded and dug his nails into the flesh. Jed choked, gasping for air. He whanged a haymaker to the killer's head. Pardlin's hold on his throat released a little, then tightened.

"You'll never . . . get me—" Parlin puffed.

Jed slashed with his right. It landed under the killer's heart. A left traveled less than six inches to Pardlin's chin. The hands on Jed's throat loosened completely.

He wasn't aware of it. He ripped up another left, then slammed in a right hook that skinned his knuckles and uprooted Pardlin's front teeth. It dawned upon Jed that he was hitting a man who was out cold.

Looking up he saw the contingent of cars swerving toward the camping grounds. They stopped as he got to his knees. The whine of sirens was fading out. Troopers, guns drawn, were piling from their cars, making for him.

Captain Blakeslee reached Jed's side, looked down at Bill Pardlin, then surveyed Jed. He helped Jed to his feet, noticed the bullet wound

in the shoulder.

"Been pretty busy, eh, Jed? One of the boys found your car in a ditch. We traced your day's work to Pardlin's place, and here we are. We wondered, too, if that reported stolen car had anything to do with your whereabouts."

"It had," said Jed quietly.

He related everything, explaining in detail how, at first, indications pointed to the camp as being a narcotic outlet. Then as another pattern evolved, the real motive for the crime became apparent.

"Pardlin, himself, furnished the final clue by tugging on the flagpole ropes."

"Yes?" asked the captain, perplexed.

Jed pointed to the large eagle atop the pole. "Camouflage," he said. "It's really a short-wave aërial. Pardlin tugged those lines for a good purpose. We'll find that it automatically starts the short-wave transmitter, which, in turn, sends out a warning beam. By now, his confederates know he's been discovered and will cover their tracks as best they can."

"A spy!" gasped Blakeslee.

"Yes—F. B. I. business these days. It became my business when Lefty O'Neil and Warren were killed." Rapidly he explained Pardlin's method of telephoning the barracks about his stolen car. "He really told Lefty to take the car and lay low for the check-up. Lefty fell for it, not dreaming he was taking the sedan to the grove with the body of an F. B. I. man in the trunk. You see, Pardlin wanted Lefty nabbed for the killing. It would take suspicion, he thought, from the camp when he'd say neither Lefty nor Warren had stayed there at any time. And by the time a thorough investigation was under way, Pardlin would have eradicated any sign of his spy work."

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"But where is this short-wave transmitting set?"

Jed smiled wanly. "In the so-called tool house." He thumbed to a pair of troopers who had revived Pardlin and were guarding him. "Bring him along, boys."

Captain Blakeslee watched while Jed began to inspect the workbench in the cabin. Sullenly, Pardlin followed the trooper's every move. Jed finally nodded, pressed a bolt head that sank half its thickness into the wooden upright. Instantly the flat top of the workbench began to rise perpendicularly, hinged at the other end.

All but Jed and Pardlin marveled as an ultramodern broadcasting set rose from the inside of the bench. A circular band was rotating, shooting a beam through a celluloid film.

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Jed whirled to the killer who cringed as the trooper approached him.

"You thought you were too clever to be caught, Pardlin," said Jed icily. "You thought we'd fall for that narcotic angle and overlook you. Well, it was your mistake—and a costly one. The law knows how to deal with your kind."

Jed sucked in a deep breath.

"The law makes use of wires, clamps and electricity, too. But they aren't wired for sound—as you'll find out for yourself!"

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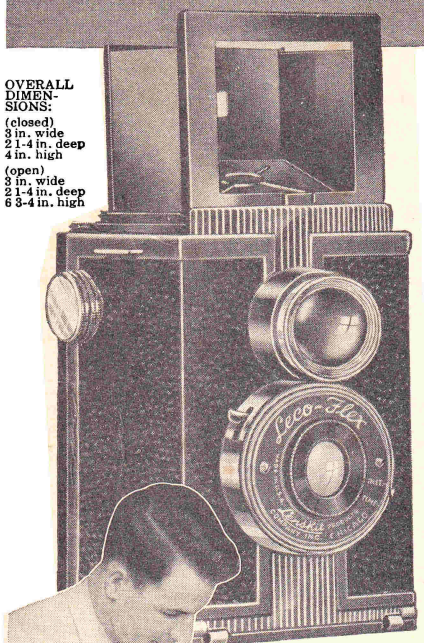

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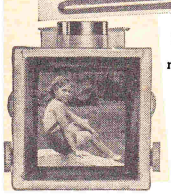

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